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Hassan El-Alfi, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

Networking the Middle East

Regional peace and cooperation will be promoted at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland. **Gamil Ibrahim** in Davos and **Nevine Khalil** in Cairo report

Some 2,000 political leaders, businessmen, academics and other experts are gathering today in Davos, Switzerland, for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum. This year's theme is "Building the network society," but several Middle East-related issues will also be discussed, including the role of business in promoting the peace process and the opening of the Middle East and North Africa to foreign investors.

On the sidelines of the conference, President Hosni Mubarak, who will arrive in Davos on Friday, is expected to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Their talks, which may be expanded to include Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, will focus on the next moves in peace-making following the agreement on redeployment from the West Bank town of Hebron.

Mubarak will also be the key speaker at a plenary session on Sunday. "President Mubarak's participation has special importance in view of the problems facing the peace process," said Raouf Ghoneim, the Egyptian ambassador in Switzerland. "His presence will not only focus attention on the peace process but will give a big push to the Egyptian economy."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Mubarak's first-time participation at Davos underlines "the importance which Egypt attaches to being represented at the highest level in discussions of international economic issues, regional economic cooperation and Egyptian economic reform."

Before returning home on Monday, Mubarak will stop in Paris for talks with President Jacques Chirac.

The Davos meeting has taken on additional significance because it followed last November's third Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA III), Ghoneim added. Many of the issues which were raised in Cairo will be pursued further at Davos.

Creating an investment-friendly environment in the Middle East and North Africa will be one of the subjects discussed at the week-long meeting. Participants are seeking answers to the following questions: Are the states of the Middle East and North Africa really committed to creating the infrastructure needed by business and foreign investors? What public-private sector partnerships are required to ensure increased economic growth?

Dealing with these questions will be Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Nabil Shaath, minister of planning in the Palestinian Authority, Andre Azoulay, adviser to King Hassan of Morocco, as well as the Israeli minister of finance.

Another Middle Eastern issue to be raised will be the impact of the Islamist movements on regional stability.

Businessman Taher Helmi, who has attended the Davos meetings in the past, described Mubarak's participation as a "perfect marketing and sales move." Helmi said that as political and business leaders meet to discuss the economic state of the world, leaders of emerging markets like Egypt "are given the chance to tell their story."

Thus, Mubarak will be given the chance once again to showcase Egypt's economic reform and development, as he did at MENA III. "It is extremely timely for the chief executive to address the world again," Helmi said.

According to Raouf Saad, assistant foreign minister for regional cooperation, the Egyptian delegation, including both state officials and businessmen, will focus on three tracks: Egypt's economic transformation, major developmental initiatives undertaken by the government and the political and economic aspects of the peace process.

"The integration of the Egyptian economy into the global economy is a basic issue for us at Davos," said Saad. "This is not a matter of mere status, but achievements which were witnessed by participants in MENA." Saad cited the New Delta project — a government plan to irrigate the arid valleys of the Western Desert with Nile water — as the kind of initiative which will be spotlighted.

The plenary session featuring senior political leaders from the Middle East will discuss the role of business in peace-making. Discussion will focus on how the private sector and governments can work together to consolidate the peace process and put the region along the path of steady growth and integration into the world economy.

Citing the Hebron agreement, Saad described the status of the peace process as being "rather positive" in comparison to its standing during MENA III. "Since the mood is different, we are opening files which were stalled because of Israel's intransigence," he said. These include the Middle East Development Bank, which has become the subject of intensified consultation, and the Middle East/Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association, which has been given a push after Israel showed greater flexibility in peace-making.

But while the Davos meeting will cover many topics of interest to the Middle East, its overall agenda is global. Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, will present his vision for the future of the world organisation and of global governance.

Set around the theme "Building the network society," the discussions will assess the impact of the information technology revolution in contributing to the creation of a new society: the network society. Discussions will focus on how corporations, countries and individuals can best adjust to the new requirements of this post-industrial era. Key shapers of the future — leaders, pioneers, developers and regulators of industry — are among the participants.

The impact of globalisation will be in the heart of the debate. Political, business and union leaders will assess the impact of globalisation on the job market and on political and social conditions. One important issue which will be discussed is how a developing country can effectively integrate itself into the network society, and the hurdles it is likely to face.

Although the ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Singapore last September achieved a surprising degree of success in achieving multilateral trade liberalisation, uncertainty continues to hang over the process.

Mubarak in US

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak is expected to visit Washington in March for talks with President Bill Clinton on ways of achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, **Atef El-Ghamri** reports from the US capital.

The Mubarak-Clinton talks will focus on activating the peace negotiations on all tracks, particularly the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and enlarging the US role in the peace process, American political sources said.

Other visitors to Washington will include Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who will visit there separately in February, as well as Jordan's King Hussein, who will visit in March.

Major focus

STRESSING that comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be achieved with an agreement between Syria and Israel, US President Clinton has said this would be his major focus in talks planned with Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian leaders over the next two months. In his first news conference since the beginning of his second term, Clinton said that peace required commitment from both parties. He also praised the agreement reached last week on the redeployment of the Israeli army from Hebron and on the timetable for the army's withdrawal from the rural areas on the West Bank.

The State Department stated that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright held telephone conversations on Tuesday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, according to the French news agency AFP.

Meanwhile Syrian Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam brushed aside Israeli suggestions that the Syrian-Israeli peace talks were about to resume after a 10-month break. He added that the Israeli media campaign to that effect was misguided. Khaddam and Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa headed for Oman yesterday as part of a regional tour taking them also to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE to drum up support for Syria's stand in the peace talks.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said yesterday he had asked his finance minister, Dan Meridor, to coordinate economic issues to be raised in future talks with Syria. As quoted in the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, he stated that he had a few ideas on how to advance talks with Syria which he will present to President Clinton next month.

Bomb blast

THREE people were killed and 12 others injured on Tuesday by a bomb blast in the Algerian town of Blida. Reuters reported that the attack occurred only a few hours after an unidentified assailant shot Abdelhak Benhamouda, an influential union leader and a political ally of President Liamine Zeroual.

No one claimed responsibility immediately for the bomb, which was hidden under a fruit stand in Blida, where Abassi Madani, president of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front, is supposedly incarcerated.

INSIDE

Khartoum counter-attack

AS SUDANESE Vice-President Al-Zubeir Mohamed Saleh continued a visit to Tehran, the Khartoum government said its army killed 24 rebels and destroyed their bases in weekend fighting in the province of Western Equatoria, which is almost entirely controlled by opposition forces.

"While a great conspiracy threatens to disrupt Sudan's national unity, the government of our country deems it necessary to consult with our friends in the region and the Islamic world, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran," Saleh told Iran's First Vice-President Hassan Habibi.

Habibi said the two countries would exchange views on the conflict in Sudan and discuss bilateral ties. Tehran, which has close ties with Khartoum's Islamist government, has condemned "all acts of aggression" in Sudan and has supported the country's unity and territorial integrity. Khartoum has denied rebel claims that Iran has provided the Sudanese army with weapons, including banned chemical weapons, cash and even troops.

Meanwhile, Khartoum television announced that "the armed forces and the people's defence forces have destroyed outlaw camps in the Dosa area on the road to the biggest outlaw camp at Fario Sekke in Western Equatoria."

There was no independent confirmation of the attack and it is difficult to assess the accuracy of reports issued by both the army and rebels who are fighting to topple Sudan's government.

State television said the army attacked bases of the rebel Sudan People's Army (SPLA) at Dosa on Friday, killing 13 people — including a captain — and wounding several others. It said that the remaining rebels had fled to Fario Sekke, their main base in the area.

The television also said that the army "overran another outlaw camp at Bari area on Sunday and killed 11 outlaws, including two officers." The army also seized rifles and ammunition.

Sudan has launched a counter-attack against the rebels who started an offensive earlier this month. Khartoum claims that Eritrea and Ethiopia are fighting with the rebels in the south and east but both countries deny any involvement. (see p.4)



photo: Randa Shaath

IT'S IN THE BAG: As *iftar* (breakfast) approaches, a young boy walks home through the district of El-Hussein carrying a bag of tamarind, a well-trodden path with which he, and many others, will have become familiar during the course of the holy month.

Legal press squabble

Journalists are seeking a court opinion to settle a legal dispute over the duration of the Press Syndicate chairman's term. Chairman Ibrahim Nafie, speaking to **Shaden Shehab**, discusses the argument and the syndicate's election plans

The Press Syndicate is going ahead with plans for elections to fill the chairman's post, despite a legal dispute which has left unresolved the question of whether the chairman should serve for two or four years.

In the meantime, two leading journalists have filed lawsuits with the administrative court demanding that the election plans be halted and seeking a legal settlement of the dispute. Syndicate Chairman Ibrahim Nafie told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that even if the court ruled in his favour, allowing him to serve for four years, he would appeal to the higher administrative court for confirmation because its decision would be final and binding.

The dispute resulted from the fact that the syndicate's activities are regulated by the provisions of two, sometimes conflicting, laws. The first is the Press Syndicate Law 76 of 1976 and the second is Law 100 of 1993, which provides "democratic guarantees for trade and professional unions."

Under the Press Syndicate law, the chairman is elected every two years for a maximum of two consecutive terms. Moreover, six of the 12 members serving on the Syndicate's Council should be chosen by lot to contest the elections along with the candidates for the chairman's post. But Law 100, on the other hand, stipulates that elections for the Syndicate's Council should take place every four years. Journalists are divided as to whether this provision is applicable to the chairman as well as Council members, or to the Council members only.

The lawsuits, in the administrative court, were filed by Mahmoud El-Tohami, editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*, and Ibrahim Hegazi, a member of the Syndicate's Council and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram Al-Riyadi*. The suits also demanded that the syndicate's plan to organise elections to fill the chairman's post be quashed. El-Tohami and Hegazi were backed by a large number of journalists who signed a petition urging the Syndicate's Council to bar nominations for the chairman's post.

But the Council, apparently determined to avoid any legal pitfalls, rejected the petition at a 6 January meeting. Three weeks later, the Council decided to accept nominations for the chairman's post between 12 and 17 March and scheduled the elections for 27 March.

The elections will be confined to the chairman's post. The six Council members who are required by the Press Syndicate law to contest the elections will not be allowed to do so, in line with Law 100.

"The Council agreed on two things," Nafie said. "The first is to allow candidates to nominate themselves [for the chairman's post] in accordance with the Press Syndicate law of 1976. Also, the Council agreed to back the journalists' demand for an interpretation of Law 100. No one has the right to prevent others from going to court. If the court rules that the chairman does not have the right to serve for four years, then we have already scheduled a period for nominations as well as the election day."

Surprisingly, Nafie insisted that even if the court ruled in his favour, allowing him to serve for two more years, he would still file an appeal, seeking an endorsement. "The ruling has to come from the Supreme Administrative Court. I will insist on this in order to get a final decision," he said.

He could, he added, have filed a lawsuit himself, "but I do not wish to interfere. If journalists want me to stay, then they are the ones that should demand the interpretation."

Nafie was keen that the issue should be settled once and for all, instead of being argued over every two years. "We are not asking for any legal amendments, and we are not asking for government interference. We are only requesting an interpretation of the two laws from the court," he said. "The court has to clarify whether Law 100 applies to the chairman or not. We are after an interpretation, not personal gain."

He explained that Article 43 of the Press Syndicate law states that the chairman is elected every two years for a maximum of two consecutive terms, and that half of the Council's 12 members are also elected every two years. "Then came Law 100, which cancelled the second term elections, allowing members to serve for four years. It has been said that the law does not apply to the chairman because it did not cancel the article that states that the chairman is elected every two years. It is as if Law 100 cancelled half of an article and left the other half," Nafie said.

On the other hand, Nafie continued, "Article 37 of the Press Syndicate law defines the Syndicate's Council as the chairman and the 12 members, which is another reason journalists argue that the chairman should be elected every four years."

From one perspective, the Press Syndicate law should take precedence over the "democratic guarantees" law because the former specifically deals with syndicate activities, Nafie said. But from another perspective, Law 100 should carry greater weight "because a subsequent law cancels previous laws," he countered.

Article 10 of Law 100 states that all other legal provisions contrary to this law should be cancelled.

Asked what he thought of the candidates who may run for election, Nafie replied: "I will do whatever is required of me until 27 March. Any of my colleagues has the right to nominate himself if he meets the criteria. Journalists can support any colleague who, they feel, will play the same role. We will all support him."

The last elections to fill the chairman's post and the Council's 12 seats were held in 1995.

FULL FORCE ahead. Egypt will cross the threshold into the next century with a comprehensive vision of the future and a strong will to face the challenges that lie ahead, President Mubarak told a distinguished gathering of state officials and police officers in a Police Day address at the Mubarak Security Academy. "The starting point is internal stability, respect for the law and the transparency of all establishments," Mubarak said.

He praised the police force in the performance of its duty to ensure the continuation of development efforts, adding: "We fully support attempts to uncover corruption and deviation, and will not be lenient with criminals."

Mubarak stressed Egypt's role "at the forefront of the fight against the anti-Islam campaign," waged by the so-called Islamic militants. He described terrorism as "a morbid page in the history of humanity," and said Egypt welcomed national or international cooperation to stifle it.

During the Police Day celebrations, which lasted for over three hours last Saturday, Mubarak inaugurated part of the new academy, which is still under construction and is expected to begin admitting students next year. He also met with the Supreme Police Council, decorated a number of distinguished police officers and awarded posthumous decorations to 23 officers killed in the line of duty. Mubarak's visit culminated in a police parade.



Diverse subjects of national interest were discussed at the 1997 Book Fair

Memories of an epic

Field Marshal Mohamed Abdel-Ghani El-Gamassi recalled preparations for the October 1973 War, which coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, at a Book Fair seminar. Khaled Dawoud attended

The 1973 Middle East war broke out on 6 October. The date coincided with the 10th day of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan of that year, which is why the hostilities are known to Egyptians as both the October War and the 10th of Ramadan Battle. It also accounts for the fact that the Egyptian victory is celebrated twice a year, depending on which calendar is observed.

Many Egyptians attribute this victory partially to the fact that the war took place during Ramadan. The religion factor is believed to have served as a crucial morale-booster — soldiers who stormed across the Suez Canal to destroy Israel's Bar Lev line of fortifications were fasting and shouting "*Allahu akbar*" or God is Great.

Nearly 25 years later, Egyptian researchers complain that not all aspects of the war and its developments have been revealed. Although the war lasted for approximately three weeks, most of the information available concerns the first week only, in which Egyptians managed to establish a beachhead on the Canal's eastern bank. In particular, two major points remain shrouded in mystery: President Anwar El-Sadat's delay in ordering his troops to press ahead with their offensive in the Sinai Desert; and Israel's success in slicing through Egyptian lines and moving troops and equipment to the canal's western bank.

The answers provided so far appear politically motivated. Sadat's opponents blamed him for failing to order a continued offensive at a time when Israeli troops were reeling in shock. They also claimed that differences between Sadat and his commanders made it possible for Israel to launch the counter-attack across the canal.

But Field Marshal Mohamed Abdel-Ghani El-Gamassi, who was director of operations during the war, and others, argue that the aim of the war was not to liberate the entire Sinai Desert in one blow, an objective beyond Egypt's military capability at the time. Gamassi also vehemently rejects all claims that belittle the Egyptian victory, insisting that the Arabs achieved a major success in shattering the myth of Israeli military invincibility. Without the 1973 War, Gamassi argued, Sinai would not have been liberated, nor would Israel have been forced to negotiate peace with its Arab neighbours.

Speaking at a Book Fair seminar, Gamassi, who later became defence minister, said the decision to go to war — taken in 1972, not 1971 as some historians have written — was made in very difficult circumstances and required tremendous planning and preparation.

In 1971 Sadat took the major step of expelling nearly 20,000 Soviet military advisers because of Moscow's reluctance to provide Egypt with the weapons it needed for the liberation of Sinai. Then, on 24 October 1972, Sadat took a second momentous decision. He met with his army commanders and informed them of his conviction that there was no possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict with Israel and no alternative but to wage war with the weapons already in the Egyptian arsenal. Shortly afterwards, Sadat appointed Ahmed Ismail, a man who supported his views, as defence minister.

"With the weapons we had to hand, accurate planning and the courage of our fighters, we were able to bridge the gap between our abilities and those of the Israeli army," Gamassi said.

But the most vital decision of the operation, Gamassi continued, was to go to war jointly with Syria. The cooperation forged at the time between the two countries was an example of how political coordination could result in a successful joint military effort. Army commanders from the two countries exchanged secret visits and agreed that attacks on Israeli troops would be launched in both Sinai and the Golan Heights.

"Sadat informed us [army commanders] that the war's strategic goal was to challenge the Israeli security doctrine by carrying out a military attack to inflict the heaviest possible military losses on its troops and convince Israel that the price for remaining in Sinai would be very high," Gamassi told the seminar.

The plan, he added, was to launch major air strikes against both Sinai and the Golan simultaneously. These would be followed by an Egyptian offensive across the Suez Canal with the aim of gaining 15 to 20 kilometres on its eastern bank. After pausing for mobilisation, the Egyptians would advance in the direction of the Mitla and Giddi passes in central Sinai. In the meantime, the Egyptian navy would block the Bab Al-Mandab entrance of the Red Sea to prevent oil tankers from reaching Israel. Meanwhile, it was estimated that Syria would be able to liberate the Golan in four to five days.

It remained only to decide the exact optimum timing for the attack. Egyptian experts carried out detailed studies of winds, tides and water currents in the canal, while another group examined the Israeli calendar. There were three major feasts in October alone, including Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) on 6 October, in which life comes to a total halt, including a radio and television shutdown. On that day the Israeli army's ability to mobilise troops and call up reserves would be drastically reduced.

The studies were presented to Sadat in April 1973. He was very impressed and called for a joint meeting with Syrian army commanders. This meeting was held in Alexandria on 22 August, and the 6 October date was set.

Meanwhile, Sadat carried out an elaborate plan to deceive the Israeli government into believing that Egypt would not resort to war. Egypt announced that a military exercise would be staged between 1 and 7 October. Tens of thousands of troops were sent for training, but between 20 and 30 per cent of them were allowed home shortly afterwards to give foreign powers the impression that nothing serious was afoot. The Egyptian navy had also agreed to send some of its destroyers for repairs in Pakistan — another move intended to confound the enemy, as it was arranged that the ships would reach Bab Al-Mandab on 6 October precisely.

"Any honest analysis of this war confirms that it was a great achievement by Egypt and the Arab countries," said Gamassi. "It was a dividing line between two eras, and what is going on right now [the peace process] is a direct result of this war."

A future for tourism

Tourism is on the increase, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui told a Book Fair seminar. But his optimistic outlook was challenged by other panellists, reports Rehab Saad

Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui has told a Book Fair panel discussion that tourism, which he termed "the engine of economic development," was on the increase and that its prospects were bright. But he was challenged by other panellists who argued that the industry was not achieving its full potential.

A record 3.8 million tourists visited Egypt in 1996 — a 24 per cent increase over the previous year. Tourist nights increased by 16 per cent, and tourist spending by 31 per cent. "These figures are the result of our marketing efforts, the diversity of the Egyptian tourist product, security and safety, and the strong support of the political leadership," Beltagui said.

Tourism was a principal foreign currency earner, and unlike other industries that replace men with machines, it provided job opportunities, Beltagui continued. He estimated that a single hotel room provides three to 3.5 jobs. Tourism, he added, would have a part to play in Egypt's achievement of its dream to break out of the Nile Valley and extend its living space into the desert.

However, other panel members took issue with Beltagui's rosy picture of the industry and its future. Samir Ragab, board chairman of Dar Al-Tahrir publishing house, raised the issue of lack of coordination between the Ministry of Tourism and other ministries and authorities. "For example, the Ministry of Tourism might ask for the building of docks for Nile cruisers but local authorities would refuse," he said. "Or the road between Aswan and Abu Simbel would be closed and, although this was bound to affect tourism, the ministry could not do anything."

Beltagui responded that tourism was a product requiring social interaction and that social awareness should be increased as part of the effort to promote tourism. "The official who orders a road to be closed should be aware of the consequences, and he should also be aware of the consequences of refusing to have a dock constructed," he said.

Another issue raised was that of tourist numbers. While numbers have undoubtedly increased, panellists pointed out that the number of visitors was still relatively modest in comparison to those visiting other countries which lack Egypt's attractions. "In order to increase numbers, some points must be taken into consideration," Beltagui said. "More hotels should be built, access points such as airports should be increased, roads and their services should be improved, the promotion budget should be increased and the social awareness of the importance of tourism should be enhanced."

Mahmoud Kamel, travel writer for *Al-Ahram* newspaper, spoke about the impact of tourism on the environment. "If the environment is destroyed, then tourism will collapse. What is the impact of tourism on archaeological sites? What is the impact on tourist resorts such as Hurghada, which had a mere 20,000 inhabitants and now receives around 400,000 tourists?" he asked.

"I agree that development in Hurghada was haphazard," Beltagui responded. "The beaches were damaged, there was sea-filling [dumping sand to increase the size of beaches] and the destruction of coral reefs. However, we are trying now to deal with all these problems with the help of a Dutch expert. Moreover, Hurghada makes up only 43km of the 1,800km Red Sea coastline. Development of this coastline, which is full of natural wealth, will take the right track and everything will be carefully calculated.

"As for archaeological sites, we made an attempt to preserve the monuments on the west bank of the Nile in Luxor by building a centre to organise visits to the tombs, but unfortunately the project failed. As for the rest of the monuments, I believe that they are well looked after by the Supreme Council of Antiquities and whenever any deterioration is reported, the monuments are closed for restoration."

Gamal Badawi, editor-in-chief of *Al-Wafd* newspaper, spoke of the possibilities of promoting rural tourism. Egypt has a beautiful countryside with the Nile running through it, he said, both of which could attract tourists.

But Beltagui replied that conditions were not ripe for this type of tourism. "Firstly, getting involved in the tourist industry may not appeal to countryside residents, who do not have the qualifications to receive tourists," he said. "Moreover, there is not a good network of roads, nor enough hotels. More time is needed if we are to start this kind of tourism."

Domestic tourism and the inability of many Egyptians to take holidays in existing tourist sites because of high prices was one of the main points raised by the audience attending the discussion. Beltagui answered that, "while we encourage domestic tourism, we cannot interfere in the mechanism of the market. We do not have the authority to force hotels to offer Egyptians special prices. However, we intend to encourage the building of three-star hotels in tourist resorts which Egyptians would be able to afford."

Bounty at sunset

Feeding the poor in Ramadan has turned into a competition in generosity as an increasing number of wealthy Muslims sponsor 'tables of mercy' to provide free daily *iftars*. Khaled Dawoud reports

Life can be a little easier for the needy in Ramadan. In the nation's major cities, the poor and thousands of others who are unable to get home in time for the sunset *iftar* (breakfast) meal during the holy month of Ramadan, need not go hungry. Tables are laid out hours before the sun goes down to provide the needy faithful with a free *iftar* once the *muezzin* chants the evening prayers, the signal to end the day's fast. The meals are paid for by wealthy Muslims who believe that feeding a fasting person will earn them a reward in heaven.

In the past, free food was distributed at mosques during Ramadan. But nowadays, merchants, politicians, businesmen, actors and actresses and even nightclub owners have joined what amounts to a kind of competition, hanging out banners inviting people to their "tables of mercy."

Customers have been confused, however, by a religious opinion recently put forward by Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University, stating that Muslims should not eat food provided by belly dancers and others whose wealth might have been tainted by usury or drug trafficking.

Despite Hashem's high rank in the conservative Islamic theological institute, other scholars, and ordinary people on the street, disagreed.

"If someone wants to do good, even if their life is sinful, why should they be prevented from doing it?" asked Hamdeya, a maid who works in Zamalek and breaks her fast every day at the table provided by prominent actress Sherihan.

Sherihan has laid out tables every Ramadan for the past six years, feeding at least 200 people a day. The meals she offers — rice, vegetables, a piece of meat, an orange and a sweet drink — are considered superior to the fare provided at many other tables in Cairo.

The other entertainer competing with Sherihan this year in offering food to the poor is Fifi Abdou, Egypt's number one belly dancer. According to an Arabic-language weekly magazine, Abdou pays up to LE30 for each meal provided to her guests — making her meals very expensive compared to those at other tables of mercy. But Abdou's customers are fewer than Sherihan's — possibly because of Hashem's unsettling pronouncement.

Other entertainers have joined together to finance a table of mercy on Al-Tahrir Street in Dokki. Even the owners of nightclubs along the Pyramids Road, considered by many as dens of vice, have not missed the opportunity to demonstrate their piety and finance their own tables.

In poor districts such as Boulaq, the tables of mercy can be a sorry sight. People may sit on the ground and their meal is usually a meatless *fatta* — rice and bread dipped in soup.

The largest table of mercy in Sayeda Zeinab is provided by Parliament Speaker Ahmed Fathi Sorour, together with leading merchants of the area. Zakariya Azmi, a member of parliament and the chief of President Hosni Mubarak's office, also finances a large table in his native district of Hadayek Al-Qubba. Many other members of parliament are known to pay for meals for the poor in their constituencies.

Emadeddin, downtown Cairo's "cinema street", is another centre for tables of mercy, provided, in this case, by owners of car spare parts shops, and other merchants. El-Agawani, who sells factory machinery, has been financing the largest table in Emadeddin for the past 10 years. He feeds more than 800 people a day, a figure unbeaten except by a table in Dokki near the Shooting Club, where a group of businessmen have been financing *iftars* for the past four years, for more than 1,500 people daily.

El-Agawani's customers include many bus drivers. As the time for *iftar* approaches, drivers park their buses along the street before taking a short break to consume their meal. Traffic policemen, guards and workers in nearby shops are also among the daily guests.

Saad Zalam, the dean of the Arabic-language department at Al-Azhar University, estimated in a recent interview with an Arabic-language magazine that at least six million Egyptians eat their *iftar* meals at more than 10,000 tables of mercy throughout the nation during Ramadan. He believes the phenomenon should be encouraged because it teaches people to do good and "might be the beginning of a closer relationship with God. So, why should we discourage people from this good custom?" he asked.

Sherihan's table is run by her secretary. One of his greatest pleasures, he said, was to wait until all the guests have finished their food before thinking about eating himself. The same view was expressed by the attendants who were laying the table and distributing the food.

In El-Agawani's shop, Muslim and Christian workers work happily together to cook the meals. *Iftar* time is a moment of relief and pleasure for them too, as they watch their guests enjoy consuming what they have prepared.

Such is the eagerness of some wealthy people to help the poor during Ramadan, that they have gone as far as making home deliveries to those unable to walk to the nearest table of mercy, according to a report in an Arabic-language newspaper.

Forever *Aida*

A second production of Verdi's *Aida* in Luxor's Valley of the Queens, planned for October, is already the subject of controversy, reports Rehab Saad

Plans by the Cairo Opera House to stage a spectacular production of Verdi's *Aida* in front of the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Luxor have run into opposition. Egyptologists fear that the event, celebrating the 125th anniversary of the opera's world premiere in Cairo and the 75th anniversary of the discovery of King Tutankhamun's Tomb, will jeopardise the safety of the monuments. Similar concern was expressed before a 1994 performance of the opera in the same location.

The Temple of Hatshepsut and its terraces, with the hills of the Theban Necropolis towering behind, provides a unique, dramatic backdrop for the tragic love story between a captured Ethiopian princess and an Egyptian military commander.

"We can build a stage in front of the temple and the mountainous background can also be fully utilised," Nasser El-Ansari, head of the Opera House, told a recent news conference. "The audience can be seated comfortably and there is also plenty of parking space." The location can accommodate up to 5,000 spectators, and El-Ansari estimated that as many as 24,000 people could turn up for performances during the six-day run.

"We had good reactions from a lot of people following the 1994 performance," he said, adding that the cultural benefits and tourist revenue of the event had been carefully calculated.

However, the planned production came as unwelcome news for many Egyptologists. "I am completely against this idea. Is it so difficult to find a location to perform *Aida*, other than the Hatshepsut Temple?" asked Ali Radwan, former dean of the Faculty of Archaeology.

He claims that the temple suffered damage as a result of the 1994 performance, and that problems also occurred when *Aida* was performed at the Giza Pyramids. The high volume of sound, created by electronic amplification, harmed the Sphinx and the Temple of Khafre, Radwan maintained, adding that Luxor temple was also affected "and continues to suffer up till now" from a performance of *Aida* in 1986.

He was not, he stressed, opposed to the performance of *Aida*, "but I am against the violation of the monuments," Radwan said. He suggested that a cultural centre be built in Luxor to stage such productions.

Ahmed El-Sawi, another Egyptologist, shared Radwan's view, insisting that "musical and dancing activities" should not be staged near the monuments. He went as far as opposing the *son et lumiere* performances at the Pyramids and Karnak Temple "because I am sure they damage the monuments in one way or another."

The solution he suggested was to stage just one performance of these various events, which would be filmed. Videotapes of the performances could then be sold at a large profit.

Abdel-Halim Noureddin was secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities when the first production at Hatshepsut Temple was staged in 1994. He did not oppose the concept of another production, provided certain conditions were met. "The plans of the stage which were presented to me in 1994 were different from the actual layout," Noureddin said. "According to the plans, the stage was far away from the temple, but in fact the construction encroached onto the temple grounds." This time, he said, there should be a minimum distance of 200 metres between the stage and the temple complex.

Other potentially damaging practices which were allowed in 1994 should be banned for this production, Noureddin continued. No tents should be set up in the temple yard, which is considered part of the temple, and buses bringing the audience to the performance should not be allowed close to the site. In addition, all debris must be removed from the site after the performance, and not left to litter the necropolis, as was the case in 1994.

Noureddin was sceptical of the benefits brought to the tourist industry by the 1994 performance. "Does tourism need the opera to flourish? Or are there are other and better ways of promotion such as advertising, good road connections and keeping the monuments in good condition? Did opera officials actually sell a large number of seats, or were many places given away as complimentary tickets?" he asked.

Those in the tourist industry, on the other hand, are convinced that a new production of *Aida* at Luxor would boost tourism.

"I am in favour of staging *Aida* there on a regular basis," said Ilhami El-Zayyat, head of the Chamber of Travel Agencies. "An opera in Luxor is a spectacular event. We have to develop our tourist trends. People do not always travel for the sake of travelling these days; they often travel for a specific purpose, such as a football championship. Events tourism has become very popular."

Mohamed Nessim, head of the Hotels Chamber, underlined the importance of proper marketing to ensure the event attracts a large number of visitors.

The Opera House will be employing an American company to market the event, El-Ansari said. "The marketing company is going to promote the event through its 74 offices throughout the world. It is going to hold press conferences and will invite specialised writers to visit Egypt to write about the event in advance. There will also be advertisements on foreign television stations."

But how will this year's production and organisation differ from 1994's? On the organisational front, spectators will not cross the Nile to the west bank to watch the opera on ferries or pontoon bridges, as was the case in 1994, but will use the Luxor Bridge, the construction of which will be completed in March.

There will be changes on the artistic side, too. The director of the 1994 production was criticised for deciding to hide the Hatshepsut Temple in its entirety for fear that it would distract the audience from the performance. "The director insisted that the temple be completely hidden, which made moving everything to the west bank and paying all these expenses futile," Noureddin explained.

According to El-Ansari, this mistake will not be repeated by the director of the new production, Attilio Colonnelo, an Italian who specialises in producing open air operas. "He will make full use of the temple as background, and all of the audience will be able to see it," El-Ansari said.

Addressing the same news conference, Colonnelo said: "The events of the opera will interact with the natural Pharaonic setting provided in the background."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

هكذا من الأصل

The end of modernisation?

Islam: a threat or a promise? Liberal democracy: the last stop, or only a way-station for one-dimensional man?

Omayma Abdel-Latif speaks to Francis Fukuyama and Abdelwahab Elmessiri





Francis Fukuyama, currently a fellow of the John Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies (Foreign Policy Institute) and director of its telecommunications project, raised international controversy in 1989 when his article "The End of History?" appeared in the Washington-based periodical The National Interest. *He announced then that the end of the Cold War marked "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government," a hypothesis which he developed later in* The End of History and the Last Man *(Free Press, 1992). Fukuyama is also a former deputy director of the State Department's policy planning staff and analyst at the RAND Corporation. His most recent book is* Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity *(Free Press, 1995).*

If Western liberalism is, as you argue, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution, how do you view the rise of political Islam in many parts of the world and the widely-held perception in many Western circles that it poses a threat no less dangerous than communism?

Political Islam is obviously a very powerful force in the Islamic world. But as a challenge to Western liberal democracy, it seems to me quite different from Marxism or communism in that its appeal has never been as universal as that of socialism. For example, I do not think Islam has made any particular new conquests. There are no new converts to the religion or people who had been Buddhists or Christians and who converted to Islam. What is really happening is a re-conversion — mostly of immigrants. That is not really conversion.

Although there is a very powerful Islamic revivalism going on in many parts of the world, it is only happening in countries which are culturally Islamic. This has to do in many ways with the fact that the fundamentalist versions of Islam are very much a reaction to the failure of the modernisation process in Islamic countries. Therefore, political Islam will continue to be restricted to one particular part of the world. I still think it will remain a challenge, but on a rather different level than communism.

Yet you have also said that the appeal of Islam is potentially universal, reaching out to all men as men and not as members of a particular ethnic or national group.

What I meant to say was that, in theory, Islam is just like Christianity and in that sense is different from Judaism, where there is a chosen people. While many religious doctrines are meant to apply to members of a particular ethnic group, that is not the case with Islam. So doctrinally, there is a deep universalism to Islam, but as far as historical facts are concerned, there have been relatively few converts. The rising numbers of people professing belief in Islam in Europe, for example, are simply the result of immigration. Immigrants from Islamic countries who were secular in an earlier period have now found their faith again and adopted the religion. But the number of people who have actually moved from a different religion to Islam has been very limited.

Why, then, did you say that Islam constitutes a systematic ideology posing a grave threat to liberal practices and that it has defeated liberal democracies in many parts of the world?

The Islamic world has gone through a number of different stages. There was a period where you had liberal doctrines, for instance in Egypt towards the end of the 19th century, and more liberal forms of Islam that were religious but tended to accommodate aspects of modern life. But the kind of Islamic fundamentalism that began with the Iranian revolution and spread in various places is not a liberal doctrine and obviously has become the dominant political form in Iran or Afghanistan, while both Algeria and Egypt are struggling to deal with these conservative Islamic movements. Besides, one part of the world where liberal democracy has really made no headway in the past ten to fifteen years is the Islamic world, whereas a number of transitions to democracy took place in eastern Asia, Latin America and the former communist world.

Your argument posits an either-or situation between Islam and liberal ideas.

In fact, I never meant to suggest that. In the past, there certainly have been forms of Islam that were quite compatible with liberal democracy and actually, the further away you get from the Middle East heartland, in a way, the more you see different examples — in Malaysia or Indonesia there are more liberal forms of Islam, there is doctrinal leeway for a certain degree of separation between secular and religious authority. I do not think that there is anything necessarily inherent in Islam that prevents it from being compatible with liberal democracy. The problem is not theoretical. But most forms of political Islam that have been politically important in recent years do not separate secular and religious authority and that is really critical if a religion is to be compatible with modern liberal democracy. The Protestant reformation, under certain circumstances, secularised public life and made it possible for religion to be simply a matter of private choice. This paved the way for a kind of secular politics. I think that has not been the dominant trend in political Islam and its most recent incarnations, and I think there is a certain incompatibility, at least for the most fundamentalist versions of Islam, with modern liberal democracy.

Some would argue though that this "fundamentalist form" of political Islam is a result of a lack of democracy? The Algerian experience being a case in point.

The Algerian government may have made a very serious tactical mistake in not permitting the Islamic Front (FIS) Party to take power. It is possible that, had this happened — as in Turkey — the fundamentalists would have been assimilated into the political structure and Islam would not have taken that radicalised form. But it was not a lack of democracy per se that sparked the Islamic revolution in the first place. It has to do with a certain social discomfort with the whole process of economic modernisation. The same force that led to the rise of nationalism in Europe is leading to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Islamic world. These radicalised forms of Islam are basically due to the transition from a segmentary, agricultural society to a more urban, industrial society. This process of transition put tremendous stress on societies and I think the rise of political Islam has to be seen within this context.

By trying to suppress political Islam, you create sympathy for the movement and resentment against the existing powers, but even if most Middle Eastern countries were more democratic than they are, political Islam could continue to seek power. It is related more to this transition to modernisation than to the lack of democracy per se.

How do you visualise the future of political Islam?

As the fundamentalist forms of political Islam continue to exist, there probably will be continuing violence and confrontation. But on the other hand, I believe that fundamentalist Islam is not going to be with us forever, because it does not really offer a solution to the underlying problems that brought it into being in the first place. If you look at a country like Algeria, which faces extremely serious population problems, continuing poverty, inequality and lack of development, I do not think that an Islamic party would have the solution even if it came to power.

Therefore I would expect that there will be further developments within Islam. The more rigid fundamentalist forms may evolve into something different, more compatible with a certain form of economic modernity. When the Protestant reformation first occurred, an extremely austere, fundamentalist form of Puritanism gave way, within a generation or two, to a very different kind. Something like that may happen in the next generation in the Islamic world.

In your most recent work, you wrote that national cultures are a predominant factor in shaping economic growth, but this cannot work without some kind of moral structure. How does this relate to the popular notion of clashing cultures and civilisations?

My claim, in fact, was much more modest. I said national cultures were important factors. They combine with other factors that any economist must consider: macro-economic policy, savings, resources, labour and skills. National culture is only one element explaining economic growth. I think culture will continue to be very important, but on the other hand, it is also undeniable that marginalising tendencies will continue to operate. Thus, people will cling to their own cultures and will want to relate to each other socially in distinctive ways. That is a necessary element in modern society. You cannot do away with moral connections between people. Conversions of some institutional forms may take place — globalisation and trade and the coming together of the world in a kind of a global village — but on the other hand, people will insist on their moral separateness and their particular moral communities bound together by particular rules. Thus, globalisation, on one hand, and the tendency towards particularism, on the other, will take place simultaneously.

Do you think this is bound to create a clash or confrontation of cultures?

It is not clear why the diversity of cultures should necessarily lead to a military conflict. While culture is important, Huntington puts boundaries around very large cultural groups like Islam or the West or Confucianism, and I think that actually most of the really meaningful cultural identities are much smaller. In fact, they are not identities at all; they have to do with ethnic groups or sects or subcultures. Rwanda and Burundi are just an ethnic clash; similarly the conflict in Afghanistan is simply one particular sect or faction clashing with another.

But peaceful cultural competition between two societies is possible. I think the US and Asia have been engaged in that kind of competition over the last generation or so. It proved to be socially productive in the sense of heightened economic competition, self-criticism within the societies and a certain degree of cultural change.

But could certain culturally-motivated factors be an obstacle to economic growth?

There are certain cultural obstacles and there is a large literature coming from Max Weber about the impact of certain traditional religious beliefs that prized leisure over work. So in this kind of traditional culture, you can have real obstacles to economic activities. And, as I have said, trust means people's ability to work spontaneously in groups and that shapes economic development very strongly. In some societies, family and kin are extremely important, but then outside kinship, it is very hard for people to trust, and therefore to work with one another. You might find this in China, parts of southern Europe, America and, I suspect, also in the Middle East. But in other societies like Germany and Japan it has been relatively easy for strangers to come together and that contributed to the formation of large economic organisations.

The very religious traditions you have mentioned as an obstacle to economic growth, however, could be an important factor in shaping a moral structure where trust would flourish.

I never meant to suggest that religion would be the sole provider of a moral structure. Moral structure is a positive good and societies need that, for economic life as well as other aspects of social and political life. So I would by no means argue that you have to secularise life and get rid of moral relationships if you are trying to modernise. I think just the opposite is the case. But certain moral systems are more or less compatible with the ability of people to cooperate.

How do you envisage man at the end of history?

The later part of my book deals with Nietschze's concept of the last man — his vision of human nature at the end of history. It was a fairly bleak picture because, in one sense, what is meant to be human was a struggle for recognition that resulted in all the political struggles of human history. If you have settled all the large political questions and made that kind of struggle unnecessary, the range of possibilities for human development suddenly becomes much more constricted and therefore the last man is a human being that emerges at the end of history with much narrower goals: simply irrational consumerism without any heroism. That is the danger of a life in a democratic society. On the other hand I think that is not really my sense of the real problems in actual democracies like the United States.



Is there any relationship between the concept of technological utopia — man's total control over nature — on the one hand, and "the end of history", on the other?

Strictly speaking, some of the most powerful and accurate criticism of the end-of-history hypothesis has to do with the open-ended nature of technology and modern natural science — which is to say there cannot be an end of history. Technology itself is never completed, and there is no such thing as total mastery of nature. As long as that is true, you cannot really tell whether the current political and social institutional arrangements are ever going to be ultimately satisfactory. My argument about the reason why liberal democracy has appeared in many parts of the world in the recent generation has to do with the current level of development of technology. The complexity of modern economies and the nature of a lot of modern information technology make it very difficult to control any economy centrally and impose a decentralised form of economic decision-making. I think this was at the root of the collapse of communism. Therefore there is a firm technological reason for the emergence of market economies and more open political systems. The development of a modern industrial economy pushes countries in the direction of liberal democracy, but it is true that this does not lead to a final state in which a man achieves complete utopia and a mastery of nature, bringing the historical process to a close. It is a much more open-ended process and, as long as it is open-ended, we are not going to really have an end of history.

Abdelwahab Elmessiri, a prominent Arab Islamic thinker, is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University and has worked extensively on ideas of history and the self. His first work was The End of History (1972). *In* The Earthly Paradise, *he argues that the American and modern technological imagination is dissatisfied with dialectics and complexity, and therefore seeks a happy, or at least a comfortable, ending. He has developed the idea that modernity, as a form of "immanentisation", leads to the disappearance of human space and the deconstruction of man. Value-free science is another important theme in* Epistemological Bias (2 vols., 1995). *His forthcoming works are* Encyclopaedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism: A New Explanatory Paradigm *and* The Encyclopadia of Comprehensive Secularism. *Elmessiri has also translated English romantic poetry into Arabic and Palestinian resistance poetry into English.*

What is the view from within — a Muslim's view — on the relationship between Islam and the West?

We have to place the concrete experience of the Muslims with the West in a complex historical context. The first dialogue between the West and Islam was an armed one. The imperialist troops of Europe marched on Africa and Asia, and pounded Muslim societies with superior military technology. Despite the imperialist onslaught, however, many Arab thinkers called for an adoption of Western modernity, for it had produced coherent societies with a sense of purpose, stable family structures, humanistic value systems, and impressive technological achievements.

Western modernity, to use post-modern terminology, was logo-centric, based on stable epistemological, moral, and signifying systems. Imperialism, Zionism, racism, and the genocide of Native Americans were all marginalised as mere deviations from an otherwise wholesome humanistic culture.

But in the mid-fifties things changed. Western civilisation became less self-assured. Relativism became the only absolute. Family values became a mere campaign slogan, and phrases such as "alternative lifestyles", "sexual preferences" and "single-parent families" became part of the cultural lexicon in the West. Post-modernism waged a continuous attack on norms, advocating a world without a centre. The idea of history itself came under attack, for history could be a source of norms and values and man's historical experience could provide him with a *telos* (purpose) and a *logos* (a centre). All of this was accompanied by a growing awareness in the Third World that imperialism is an organic part of Western modernity. Israel, far from being a mere deviation, was viewed as a concrete manifestation of the modern Western cultural formation. American ruthlessness in Vietnam did not help matters much, and the American defeat there also opened up possibilities. Many intellectuals in the Islamic world (and elsewhere) started asking questions regarding Western modernity, and a quest for an alternative modernity began. This disenchantment with Western modernity is at the heart of Islamic revivalism. But let me add that this questioning is not a unique Islamic phenomenon. Many Western intellectuals are also disenchanted and are looking for alternative modernity. This last fact encouraged Muslim intellectuals to deepen their critique of Western modernity and to re-examine their own Islamic heritage in the hope of finding a new basis for the evolution of a new modernity, one that does not necessarily end with the death of God, the death of man, the destruction of nature and a veritable end of history.

But why do some Western scholars perceive this return to our roots as a threat to their well-being?

I have argued elsewhere that Western modernity is based on a metaphysics of immanence that denies transcendence. The world is seen as self-activating, self-transforming and self-explanatory. The laws immanent in nature are sufficient as a basis for explaining both man and nature. This is the basis of Western rationalism. Within that frame of reference, the sources of man's motivation and conduct have to be found within his material self or within natural laws. In other words, man is reduced to nature, the human is reduced to the material. As a result of this process, man began to be defined not in terms of his needs, longings, desire to transcend, namely not in terms of his full human complexity, but rather in terms of the simple laws of nature. This accounts for the centrality of the natural or physical science model, which presupposes a natural man in the Western imagination. On the concrete social level, this abstract concept takes two concrete forms: economic man (Adam Smith and Marx), and libidinal man (Freud). The world founded by Western modernity operated in terms of this image of man. I am not here referring to the whole Western intellectual tradition, but to what I term the "operative paradigm" — namely the paradigm that underlies concrete political, military and economic decisions. Dissenting humanistic and anarchistic voices do not contribute to the formation of the operative paradigm.

To envisage an image of man different from the one propagated by Western modernity, to develop (or even dream of) a modernity that would not necessarily result in reification and commodification, and to see the natural sciences as inadequate in charting man's full complexity: to do this is to represent a real threat, for this new image of man cannot be easily accommodated within the restricted parametres of technological rationalism and value-free rationalisation. Max Weber predicted that this process, if left unchecked, will turn society into something like a workshop, and will land man in an iron cage, where everything is controlled, calculated, instrumentalised. The multinationals and the Pentagon operate in terms of a "global" market that is no different from Weber's iron cage — a market for one-dimensional man.

The modernity that some Islamists are trying to develop posits the dream of freedom, of man as responsible agent, who is not reducible to material determinism, and therefore a man who is unpredictable in some aspects of his behaviour, and consequently cannot be fully utilised and instrumentalised. It is only in that sense that Islam is a threat. But it is a threat just as Western humanists are also a threat, in the same sense that critics of Western modernity or environmental activists are a threat.

Does that mean that Islamic thought and Western liberal democracy are incompatible?

If we accept the idea that Western modernity is the adoption of value-free science and technology and the adaptation of man to a value-free society committed to ideas of change and relativism, and an ethics of process where the only absolute is 51 per cent of the votes, where the fate of man and his value systems are subjected to the counting of fingers, if we accept this as a working definition, then any humanism would be incompatible with liberal democracy. We should remind ourselves that the majority of the American colonists did not condemn the extermination of the Native Americans. During World War II the US government rounded up citizens of Japanese extraction, with the full consent of the American people. The government put people who neither spoke Japanese nor sympathised with Japan in internment camps.

The Muslim critique of Western democracy is not unique: it is a global phenomenon. The unique position of Islam derives from the fact that our critique of Western modernity is optimistic.

In what sense?

We have a project. We believe in God and we think we can change the world. Yes, we still dream of setting up governments that preserve justice and of a man not necessarily committed to pleasure and self-interest. We think we can achieve some measure of progress and still preserve the family, we can incorporate democratic procedures within a system that postulates ultimate values.

Do you believe there is still room for dialogue with the West, given that Western civilisation — to quote your last book — divides human beings into supermen and submen?

Western modernity is based on a unilinear view of history, the idea of infinite progress and the conquest and control of nature. There are many humanist traditions in the West based either on Christian values or on a secularised version thereof. They reject this insane unilinearity and mentality of conquest. Muslims can definitely engage in a dialogue with those elements. We can all cooperate in the attempt to evolve a more humane and complex modernity. But there is another form of dialogue; what I have referred to as an "armed dialogue", in the sense that by resisting we can force the imperialist other to recognise our existence and our rights.

Can you elaborate?

The overarching paradigm in modern Western civilisation is Darwinism. By its very nature, it cannot accept rational dialogue. Darwinism is committed to evolution, process and survival, its main mechanism is struggle and conflict, and the only way it can resolve conflict is through power. Men are either supermen who dominate, or submen who accommodate and submit. Israel is the living symbol of that in our midst. An armed fortress, a little Prussia that bulldozes houses and breaks the bones of a people asking for one of the main rights enshrined in liberal democracy, namely the right to self-determination. This state is supported and subsidised and armed by the liberal West.

Are you implying some kind of basic contradiction between theory and practice in the West?

Western modernity paints a picture of a society based on the principles of utility, pleasure and self-interest. But of course this is too simplistic and therefore impossible. A process of patching up, of cosmetic "complexification" takes place. This is notable in Fukuyama's work. At one point, the value-free physical science model is presented as the ultimate model, then in the next chapter, his discussion of the dignity of man comes out of nowhere. How can we relate the dignity of man to the laws of physics and nature? So is he revising the whole paradigm? Or is he using two paradigms? If something is of material use but comes in conflict with ideas of human dignity, how can the conflict be settled? The West has opted for the dominance of utility. Dignity is merely a decoration.

So does this amount to a clash of cultures?

The fact of the matter is that there is an Islamic culture based on the idea of a monotheistic God. Islam is a symbol of all those cultural formations that still espouse ideas of transcendence, including Western humanism itself. So it is not a case of Islam versus the West. It is a case of one civilisation based on the denial of transcendence or committed to technological rationalism as opposed to any civilisation advocating transcendence and humanism. I think this is what Huntington means when he singles out Islam and Confucianism in the "clash of civilisations." His terminology is very confused but, like Fukuyama, he believes in the end of history, the eventual triumph of the secular, the Western and the modern (all synonymous in his discourse). The only difference, however, is that Fukuyama says we are already there, while Huntington argues that some people are lagging behind, the process is not yet complete, and "something" must be done about it. That "something" is the history of Western imperialism.

How can we explain the sudden abundance of literature declaring the end of history?

Actually, for me, it is not that sudden. I discovered America in 1963, and right away I discovered the end of history. The whole enlightenment project with its view of the past as a history of backwardness and darkness implies a negation of history. The technological utopias of the Renaissance are all based on an idea of end of history. Hegel's view of history reaches its fulfilment in the end of history. The idea of America as a new Zion falls within the same pattern. Fascist ideologies and some revolutionary ideas postulate an end to history. Walt Whitman speaks of America, a new Zion, "scientising" the past, and terminating history. But all of this is simply a manifestation of the deeper pattern of applying the natural science model to human society. It meant the liquidation of the category of man as we know it. The end of history is actually the end of human history, and the beginning of natural history.

But there is another dimension. I think the West has discovered that its hegemony is weakening and has replaced confrontation with seduction, war with deconstruction. The end of history, and post-modernism, have that in common: they are based on a denial of any possibility of transcendence or reform. They advocate passivity. This is a perfect strategy for a declining West, when everybody is asked to erase his historical memory and forget his identity in order to become an economic or libidinal man who trades and enjoys in a passive way. He does not seek reform or change or transcendence. But passivity and pragmatism is for us; the West has its guns. Israel with its nuclear arsenal is an apt symbol of this end of *our* history, of this deconstruction of the human and the transcendental.

You spoke in your last book of an Islamic project. What would be its main features?

Part of our Islamic project is defending man against secular nihilism and amorality, technological rationalisation and instrumentalisation. Western modernity is based on the conquest of nature, exploitation, war: what about a modernity based on equilibrium? Developing along Western lines is impossible, because Western modernity is consumerist and wasteful of natural resources. Twenty per cent of the world's population uses 80 to 85 per cent of its natural resources. Western modernity, by definition, cannot be duplicated. We seek a new modernity based not on a revolution of rising expectations and infinite progress, but rather on the idea of a human mind at peace with itself, committed to the sanctity of man and of nature, and therefore not bent on conquest and plunder — a modernity that balances productivity with ideas of justice, ideas of individual human rights with the rights of the human community. Many Western scholars are not at all satisfied with the certainties of Western democracy and its empirical assumptions, its Hobbesian, Darwinian ideologies. Muslims can cooperate with these elements in the attempt to construct a new modernity — one that does not do away with man, and that does not declare the end of history.

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Paper agreements

As allegations of dirty deals threaten to bring down the Netanyahu government, a group of Knesset members find some measure of consensus on terms of a final settlement — a consensus that no Palestinian could accept, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

Israel's acting Attorney-General Edna Arbel last week ordered a police investigation into the abortive appointment earlier this month of Roni Bar-On as Israel's new attorney-general. After an outcry that the appointment was blatantly political — Bar-On is a criminal lawyer who happens to be a Likud Central Committee member — he resigned on 12 January after less than 48 hours in post.

The police enquiry is less to do with Bar-On's suitability than with a report last week on Israeli television. The report alleged that his appointment had received the support of Israel's orthodox Shas Party, which, with 10 Knesset members and two cabinet ministers is a crucial component of Likud's ruling coalition. Shas' support, the report said, was extended on the condition that Bar-On, as attorney-general, would grant a plea-bargain verdict on Shas leader Aryeh Deri. Deri is currently on trial for corruption, including the taking of bribes while serving as a government minister. A verdict that Deri was guilty of a minor misdemeanour would allow him to serve in the cabinet; but a conviction for corruption would finish his political career. Should there be any substance to Israeli television's allegations, it would, most Israeli political and legal analysts agree, almost certainly bring down Binyamin Netanyahu's government less than a year after it was voted into office.

Coincidentally or otherwise, the same day as the police probe was launched, eight Labour and Likud MPs presented a paper outlining their ideas on a permanent settlement with the Palestinians. The document is being viewed by some as the political basis of a national unity government should the present Likud coalition fall. For Palestinians, the paper may be post-coalition, but it is certainly not post-colonial.

Entitled a "National agreement regarding the negotiations on the permanent settlement with the Palestinians," the paper is the fruit of three months of discussions by Labour and Likud MPs headed by Michael Eitan (for Likud) and Yossi Beilin (for Labour). Eitan is leader of the Likud bloc in the Knesset. While agreeing that the paper does not represent official Likud policy, he claims that most of his party colleagues are behind it. Beilin is the most notorious wheeler-dealer in Israeli politics and a contender for the leadership of the Labour Party. One of the architects of the Oslo accords and co-author of a series of 1995 "understandings" with PLO leader Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) on a final settlement with the Palestinians, Beilin says there is nothing in the "national agreement" that contradicts the Beilin-Abu Mazen "understandings." If so, Abu Mazen is in a minority of one among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

As it stands, the paper is utterly unacceptable to any Palestinian or Arab consensus regarding a final settlement with Israel. Its main points are that no Israeli government would tolerate a return to the 1967 borders. No Jewish settlements will be dismantled in the West Bank and Gaza, with "most" being annexed to Israel, though there may be "a governing centre of the Palestinian entity outside Jerusalem's existing municipal borders." As for the 3.1 million registered Palestinians refugees, there will be no right of return to their homes in Israel's "sovereign territory."

This is where Beilin and Eitan agree. But there are also divergences in the paper. For the Labour Knesset members, the Jordan Valley will be "a special security zone", with the Israeli army stationed on the river and the 5,000 or so Jordan Valley settlers "able to remain where they are." For the Likud members, the Jordan Valley will be under "Israeli sovereignty". For Beilin, as long as the Palestinian entity is "demilitarised", possesses no army and is unable to form military alliances with any "foreign power", its "right to self-determination will be recognised." For Eitan, any entity that lacks such basic sovereign features could never be a state but rather "an enlarged autonomy."

Despite Beilin and Eitan's claims that the paper represents a "historic breakthrough" in forging a new national consensus, Israeli reactions have been mixed. The prime minister's office issued a statement saying the paper was a "private initiative of the signatories" which "does not obligate the government or the prime minister." Leader of the leftist Meretz faction, Yossi Sarid, said that while he did not reject attempts to form a consensus, the paper "could be an obstacle in the talks on the permanent agreements. The problem is not reaching an understanding between Eitan and Beilin but between two peoples."

As for representatives of the Palestinian people, their response to the document has been uniformly hostile. "It's a good agreement for the settlers and a bad one for the Palestinians," said Ahmed Tibi, an adviser to Yasser Arafat. Palestinian Authority information minister, Yasser Abd-Rabbo, slammed the paper out of hand. "The Palestinians will not accept any document which deviates from the international UN resolutions with regard to the Palestinian issue," he said. As for Yasser Arafat, he has referred to the initiative only in the most oblique of ways. In an interview with the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* on 26 January, he said: "The most important thing at present is not to make declarations, but rather to implement what has been agreed upon."

Israeli policemen clashing with Bedouins from the Jahalin tribe near the settlement of Maale Adumim, east of Jerusalem, last Monday. The Israeli police expelled dozens of members of the tribe who have been living in the area for some forty years as the settlement expands *(photo: Reuters)*

Hebron: peace or more bloodshed?

The Palestinians, believing that Israel will seek to make up for what it lost in the iterim agreement during the upcoming final status negotiations, are engaged in drawing up a counter strategy. Tarek Hassan reports from Gaza

According to an official report issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation: "Netanyahu wishes to integrate the interim accord in the final settlement, with the view that when negotiations for the final settlement begin, he will be in control of the greater part of the West Bank as a bargaining chip."

The report added that although Netanyahu can claim that he succeeded in wresting from the Americans a recognition that Israel alone has the right, during the last stage of redeployment, to determine how far it will withdraw, this recognition is the only gain Netanyahu was able to score. The report argued that the American message does not commit the Palestinians in any manner. Dr Saib Uraykat dispatched a message to the US, (considered an official document in the negotiations) which asserts that the conditions for withdrawal in the final stage will be determined through negotiations and certainly not unilaterally by Israel, in keeping with the terms of the first Oslo accord.

The Palestinians and Israelis have agreed to start the negotiations for the final settlement, two months after redeployment in Hebron. According to Palestinian sources, the negotiations will open with a plenary session, and then proceed in camera, without a media presence.

The official Palestinian report notes in this respect that the Hebron agreement is an excellent position from which to move forward to negotiate the final settlement, where big problems must be addressed.

In light of these issues, Palestinians will hold tenaciously to the political and media policy lines they have adopted during the past six months. The policy of 'balanced firmness' allows flexibility or rigidity as the political situation requires.

In the upcoming stage, the Palestinian policy will focus on the following:

— Due emphasis should be given to the fact that the true significance of the Hebron agreement is that it is the first agreement concluded between the Palestinians and the Likud government and consequently marks the end of Israeli rightist ideology, which claims "the land of greater Israel."

— Due emphasis should be laid on the importance of the implementation of agreements, not merely their conclusion, particularly in view of future 'withdrawals' from the West Bank, halting the construction of new settlements and the confiscation of Palestinian land.

— It is possible to launch a media campaign against the head of the Israeli government showing the contradictions between his stance when he was in opposition and his present policies and statements as head of the government, in the hope that this would show that the Palestinians were able to force Netanyahu to change.

— The pressure exerted on Israel at the domestic, Arab and international levels, to keep it from using the Hebron agreement to mend its relations with the world, should be maintained. On this, the Palestinian Ministry of Planning's official report states, "The real test for Netanyahu is the extent to which he will implement the phases of withdrawal from the West Bank, in letter and in spirit." The report explains that "Netanyahu did not sign the Hebron agreement as a gift from Israel, but simply to fulfill commitments already in place. Signing the agreement was not an act of free will, but an obligation resulting from previous, binding agreements."

— The Palestinians will continue to focus politically and in the media on the removal of the Jewish quarter in Hebron. The Jewish settlers constitute the most racist and extremist elements in Israeli society, and their hatred of Palestinians and opposition to the peace process is widely known. Furthermore, the Hebron agreement is only an interim agreement until the final staus settlement can be negotiated. At that stage, the Palestinians will not permit the presence of any Jewish settlements on their land. With the final settlement, Israel will hand over to the Palestinians all the land occupied after 4 June, 1967, free of Jewish settlers.

In other words, the Hebron agreement did not end the crisis of confidence between Netanyahu's government, the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. Undoubtedly more battles will be fought at both the political and media levels; at which time each party will try to win more allies, foil the manoeuvres of the other and push each other to accept desired compromises. In view of the critical situation lying ahead and the complexity of the issues to be settled, tensions between the two parties could escalate to new levels of violence at any moment.

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Ramadan bloodbath

Bombs in the capital and massacres in the villages. The Algerian president's reaction to the latest wave of violence is sending the wrong message to everyone, writes Amira Howeidy

Delivered as he was dressed in a dark suit and flanked by the Algerian flag, President Liamine Zeroual's last Friday's TV address to the nation did not offer anything new. It simply denounced the acts committed by "bands of criminals, traitors and mercenaries manipulated by external circles who are exploiting their savagery to serve foreign interests." The president did not name those "circles" and most observers contend that they are non-existent.

Since the start of Ramadan on January 10, bombs and armed attacks have killed more than 200 people. Zeroual's 20-minute speech was the first official response to the incidents. The presidential speech was eagerly anticipated by most Algerians because since the attacks started, Algeria's tightly controlled radio and television have kept complete silence. Algerians who expected clear-cut promises of an end to the unprecedented wave of violence were disappointed, however.

Instead, Zeroual's speech stirred wide-scale controversy and a war of words with the leader of the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), Hussein Ayat Ahmed.

The "traitors" referred to by Zeroual were understood to be the "Rome Charter" and "Call for peace" groups formed in early '95 and in '96. Both groups consisted of opposition party leaders and independent figures who condemned the government's military policy in dealing with the state of insurgency triggered by the cancellation of the 1992 parliamentary elections the Islamists were poised to win. Approximately 80,000 people have been killed since then, according to estimates by unofficial sources.

Frustrated by the escalation of violence, Ayat Ahmed has made press statements lately calling for the European Community and the United States to intervene and stop the killings in Algeria. In response to Zeroual's indirect accusation of Ayat Ahmed, the latter described the president's speech as "an underestimation of the Algerian people's sufferings." Just as the government used to claim that it had "crushed violence" and that only "residual terrorism" remained, said Ayat Ahmed, it is now adopting the classical stance of claiming that foreign circles, and not the government, are responsible for the state of violence.

Last year's month of Ramadan was marked by a strong wave of violence. This year's Ramadan bloodshed is additionally fueled by the approach of the parliamentary elections promised by Zeroual, which the Islamists will not contest. Diplomats have said that Zeroual is determined to ensure that there is no repeat of an Islamist victory at the ballots.

The government-appointed National Transitional Council (NTC) has held its first discussion on the new political parties' law banning the formation of political parties on the basis of religion. The law is expected to force approximately 18 currently legal parties, including Hamas and El-Nahda, to change their founding charters within one year and is viewed as a de facto ban on Islamist parties. The new constitution suggested by Zeroual was put to a national referendum last November and 85 per cent of registered voters cast a "yes" vote. The referendum's results, however, were questioned by Algeria's main political parties, most of which predicted an upsurge of violence in reaction to what they claim was a rigged election.

The bid for legitimacy which Zeroual was hoping would restore order in Algeria has so far failed miserably. The escalation of violence, however, has not altered Zeroual's policy.

According to the Algerian radio, Zeroual will soon start talks with political parties, ahead of the elections he is determined to hold despite opposition arguments that the political scene is not ready for a vote.

According to Debyali Sedeek, assistant secretary-general of the FFS, Zeroual's speech "is nothing more than an admission of failure, despite all promises, in solving the situation," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "What we want to know, or rather fear, is what will happen in the coming days in a country whose citizens feel unsafe every single second."

Rhetoric and martyrs

Why do Sudanese government statements suddenly sound very 'sergeant-majorly' about defending Arabism and Islam, asks Gamal Nkrumah

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have made it absolutely clear that they would not accept a partitioned Sudan. President Hosni Mubarak has always insisted on the territorial integrity of Sudan as a cornerstone of Egyptian security and strategic thinking. He has repeatedly said so in public statements during the past two weeks. The same sentiments were reiterated when Foreign Minister Amr Moussa visited Saudi Arabia a couple of days ago. The two-day visit focused almost exclusively on the deteriorating security situation in Sudan and the stepping up of armed resistance by the Sudanese opposition against the Islamist regime in Khartoum. "I do not think that it is possible for us to accept the partitioning of Sudan under any circumstances," Moussa declared at a press conference that took place last Saturday at King Khaled International Airport, where he was welcomed by his Saudi counterpart Prince Saud Al-Faisal. The Saudis, too, insist on Sudan's territorial integrity.

Notwithstanding, there are intensive moves by the Sudanese opposition to impress on Egyptian officials the importance of inviting John Garang, leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), to Egypt at this critical moment in Sudan's history. During their meetings with Mubarak, several key Sudanese opposition figures have relayed Garang's wish to visit Cairo and meet with Mubarak. It is not yet clear if or when an official invitation will be sent by Egypt to Garang, but many observers feel that Garang's visit to Cairo is imminent.

It is too early to judge whether the latest round of fighting between the Sudanese government and opposition forces spells the beginning of the end of the status quo in Sudan. Sudanese government sources boast that last week's inroads by opposition forces deep into Sudanese territory have been reversed. Last Thursday, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) — the umbrella grouping of the Sudanese opposition forces — requested that Egypt intervene and assist the Sudanese opposition in toppling the Islamist regime in Khartoum. Syria and Libya, on the other hand, have urged Egypt to patch up its differences with Khartoum.

President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda openly declared this week that the ongoing civil war in southern Sudan was one of national liberation from colonialism — presumably northern Sudanese colonial rule. Tension is mounting, and Sub-Saharan African countries are stepping up pressure on Arab countries to stop supporting Khartoum and to heed the southerners' cause.

Until now, the southern Sudanese have been politically marginalised. Today, Garang has emerged as the unquestionable champion of the underdog's cause in Sudan. With the SPLA firmly aligned to northern opposition groups, southerners now have a vital role to play in the Sudanese political scene. Khartoum sees the rallying cries of Arabism and Islam as the only lever it can use to compensate for its military setbacks.

Farouk Abou Issa, secretary-general of the Cairo-based Arab Lawyers Union, told the *Weekly* that there has been no foreign intervention in the fighting on the eastern and southern Sudanese fronts. "Umma Party sources said that there has been a mutiny among air force officers and that they refused to hit civilian targets in the Blue Nile Province," Abou Issa noted.

Battle-hardened southern Sudanese fighters are pressing Garang to go for the secession option as they believe that the SPLA will be betrayed by the northern Sudanese opposition and denied the chance to form a government after the present Khartoum regime falls. Garang still insists on a united Sudan as the most suitable option for advancing southern Sudanese interests. "Africa has been balkanized and divided up too often in the past. It is not in our interest to divide Sudan," he stressed recently. However, Garang conceded that he will go along with any decision reached by his people.

Having honed his fighting style in the Sudanese opposition forces, Garang is tipped to be king-maker, if not king, in a new Sudan that gives southerners as much political clout in the decision-making process as northerners. In fact, Garang refuses to accept the southerners' designation as a minority. "African peoples are actually a majority in Sudan," Gabriel Mathiang, deputy leader of the National Liberation Council, southern Sudan's 183-member parliament told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

For Garang, and the SPLA, Arabs are in a minority in Sudan. Garang sees southerners, western Sudanese (ethnic Fur, the Nuba Mountains tribes and other non-Arab ethnic groups), eastern Sudanese (Beja and other ethnic groups), the Funj of central Sudan, and even the Nubians of northern Sudan as non-Arab. All the aforementioned peoples have been traditionally marginalised. Collectively, they constitute a numerical majority in Sudan. That leaves the Arabised Africans of central Sudan — Khartoum and the Gezira — as a minority in Sudan, even though they have monopolised power since Sudan attained independence in 1956.

The southern Sudanese parliament is based in New Kush, Equatoria Province. It includes 11 members from the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains — both administratively still in northern Sudan. Mathiang, who is visiting Cairo, told the *Weekly* that: "according to the Asmara declaration, the ethnic groups now classified as northerners, want to join t' southern Sudan. They have taken up arms and have joined the SPLA. The northern opposition leaders, like Sadig Al-Mahdi and Othman Al-Mirghani have accepted and signed the Asmara protocols. They understand the implications of the agreement and of self-determination. If they betray us as Numeiri did after signing the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, then we will fight them. This is the third time that we have resorted to taking up arms against Khartoum. We first did so in 1955, then again in 1962 and now we are stronger than ever."

On the battlefield, Garang is scoring one victory after another. His military success is due, in large measure, to the scores of eastern, northern and western Sudanese joining the SPLA. Islam was never disadvantaged in Sudan. Islam is not going to be compromised with Garang and the SPLA playing a more high-profile role in Sudanese affairs. Southerners firmly believe that northerners discriminate against them — and that does not exclude those northerners who offer well-meant advice to the southerners.

"This is the final battle: either victory or martyrdom," warned Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir, last week. Bashir, the Sudanese opposition say, has a habit of walking into trouble. Usually under fire from Western, African and Arab countries for his Islamist rhetoric and war-mongering, Bashir is now caught up in a wrangle about his own officers' defections.

The normally composed speaker of the Sudanese People's Assembly andleader of the National Islamic Front (NIF) Hassan Al-Turabi, too, sounds jittery. He has just returned from a whistle-stop tour of several Arab capitals soliciting financial and military backing for the regime. He has also dispatched emissaries to the Gulf states and other Arab nations.

The Sudanese army, seeking to reverse defeats in eastern Sudan and Blue Nile Province by the SPLA and other opposition forces, has announced the handing down of death sentences for cowardice to officers who fled fighting. Other court martials involving several senior officers will follow shortly, opposition sources say. Defectors are blamed for the reversal of fortunes of the Sudanese army on several important battlefronts. SPLA sources say that Sudanese government troops are embarking on a reign of terror, pillaging villages, looting, raping and summarily executing innocent civilians in southern Sudan.

Observers note that the only soldiers who appeared to put up a strong resistance to advancing SPLA and other opposition troops are the militias of the NIF. But even the Islamist militias have failed to halt the armed opposition's advance. A clash between the Sudanese army and the US-equipped Ugandan, Ethiopian and Eritrean armies which Sudan says back the SPLA and other Sudanese opposition forces, could lead to a major conflagration in the region.

Military planes and helicopters have been assembled and flown towards the southern front near the Ugandan-Sudanese border. Khartoum claims that the SPLA base of Lokio has fallen. SPLA sources are divulging no details of their military deployment, but aviation sources in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia said that the Sudanese planes' crews were not actually Sudanese nationals. SPLA sources have warned of fighters from Iran and a number of Arab countries heading to Sudan to prepare for an offensive on Kurmuk, a key garrison town captured last week by the SPLA and other Sudanese opposition forces. Aid agencies in southern Sudan have expressed fears that new fighting will make matters worse for thousands of southern Sudanese displaced by the war.

Whodunnit?

We must not paper over mysterious letter bombs, warns **Diaa Rashwan**

A few weeks ago, five letter bombs were sent to the offices of the Arabic language daily *Al-Hayat* in Washington and three to a Kansas City prison where a number of Islamists accused of bombing the World Trade Centre in New York are detained. Just over a week later, *Al-Hayat*'s head office in London received four letter bombs, one of which exploded and wounded two guards. An explosive package sent to the paper's bureau at the United Nations headquarters in New York was discovered before it went off.

What is striking about the letter bombs is their senders' insistence on picking *Al-Hayat* as a target. This insistence could induce investigators to look for those who would benefit politically from harming the paper and spreading terror amongst its owners and employees. However, the logic of looking for the culprits amongst those who might be damaged by what *Al-Hayat* publishes, on the assumption that this may be a motive for revenge, is flawed.

Al-Hayat, like any other newspaper, has to maintain a balance between political and journalistic priorities. Above all, it provides a forum of expression for a broad spectrum of Arab opinions. The views aired in *Al-Hayat* are often banned or censored in the Arab world. However, the newspaper is not in the habit of conducting press campaigns against Arab countries, groups or organisations. Therefore, it has not made enemies hostile enough to want to inflict on it heavy punishment.

What is noteworthy about the incidents is that the targets were the paper's offices in Europe and the United States rather than its various offices in the Arab world. Even though the letters were allegedly sent from Alexandria in Egypt, not a single letter bomb reached the paper's offices in the region, namely Cairo and Beirut. This despite the fact that it presumably would have been easier to dispatch them to the paper's regional offices from Alexandria. The letters would have gone through the less efficient Lebanese and Egyptian postal services more smoothly than through the American and European ones.

Another cause for suspicion is that the second batch of letter bombs was also postmarked from Alexandria. Even if the letters really were sent from the Egyptian city, it is strange that the senders would continue to post them from there since it is undoubtedly now subject to tight security control.

What is equally striking about the letter bombs is that until the time of writing no one has claimed responsibility for them. This silence contradicts the main objective of operations carried out by political organisations opposed to a state. In other words, these groups carry out such operations to remind the authorities of their existence and the damage they are capable of inflicting.

In the case of the letter bombs, however, the Egyptian Islamist organisations, at which the finger of blame was pointed, hastened to deny involvement in the affair. What is more, they sent their denials to *Al-Hayat* to have them published. As the worldwide history of terrorism and violence confirms, most operations for which no one claims responsibility tend to be carried out by state security and intelligence services. Governments usually resort to these methods to direct messages at certain parties without having to acknowledge responsibility.

These observations narrow the range of possible offenders responsible for the letter bombs. Egyptian Islamist groups — like fellow Islamist groups in the Arab world — do not appear to have a political motive for lashing out at *Al-Hayat*. The newspaper is considered to be their most important medium of expression and publishes their official announcements. This explains why these groups published their denials in *Al-Hayat*.

Furthermore, the militant Egyptian Islamist groups operate in a manner that is at variance with the incidents under review. Groups like Jihad and Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya usually carry out quasi-military operations on Egyptian soil, in particular assassination attempts on the lives of senior Egyptian officials and politicians. This was the case in the attempted assassination of former Prime Minister Atef Sidki and the foiled assassination attempt on the life of President Hosni Mubarak. Egyptian militant Islamist groups do not usually resort to tactics such as letter bombs. The device used in such operations requires a level of technical expertise that they are unlikely to possess.

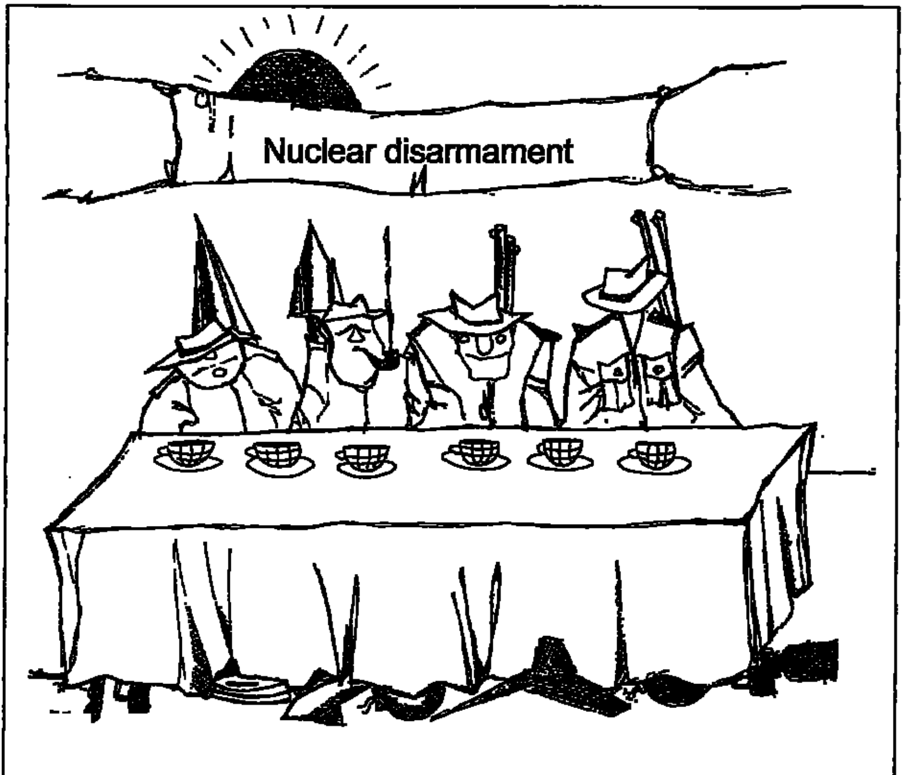
As for the Libyan possibility, it is just as far-fetched as the Islamist one. The Libyan authorities are in no need of additional conflicts with the West since the country nearly choked to death over the Lockerbie crisis. Additionally, the Libyan authorities are unlikely to involve Egypt in a crisis of this magnitude by posting the letters from Alexandria, given the close Egyptian-Libyan relations coupled with Libya's great dependence on Egypt as a gateway to the rest of the world against the continued Western siege.

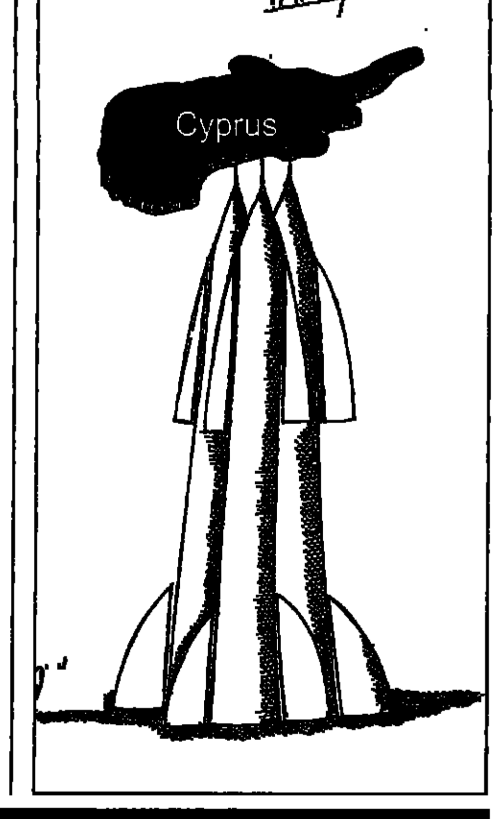
Some have implicated the Syrian authorities on the pretext that *Al-Hayat* publishes criticism of Syria's presence in Lebanon, from which most of the newspaper's reporters come. Once again, this is inconsistent with the excellent relations between Damascus and Cairo at the moment. Also, Syria cannot hope to gain from operations carried out in Western capitals at a time when relations between Damascus and Washington have improved.

All this leaves us with two strong candidates as masterminds behind the letter bombs. The first, and most likely, is the Israeli security service whose "technical" record bears this assumption out. One cannot but recall operations of a similar nature such as the Cairo letter bombs of the early sixties or the Beirut letters of the early seventies. Targeting the offices of *Al-Hayat* newspaper in Western capitals guarantees Western attention and in the process fuels rumours about the involvement of Islamist elements. This serves Israeli interests since it distorts the image of the various Islamist resistance movements opposed to Israel's occupation of territories in Palestine and Lebanon.

Additionally, involving Egypt in such an operation achieves a variety of Israeli aims. A state of instability coupled with the persistence of the Islamist threat is the preferred situation in Egypt, as far as Israel is concerned. Egyptian-Israeli relations have been strained since Netanyahu came to power because Egypt stepped up its support of the Syrian and Palestinian positions in the face of Israel's intransigence in negotiations. Therefore, throwing Egypt into confusion is clearly Israel's intention particularly when one recalls the four Israeli espionage cases uncovered by the Egyptian authorities in 1996 alone. Sending letter bombs from Egypt — or pretending to send them from Egypt — to a Western capital is meant to weaken the Egyptian government's credibility in the West.

The second and less likely possibility is that the unidentified Islamist groups in Saudi Arabia that carried out the two major bombings against American targets in the Al-Khobar and Riyadh last year are responsible for the letter bombs. Attacking *Al-Hayat* newspaper because it receives Saudi funding could be part and parcel of the attacks against Saudi government targets inside the kingdom. Targeting the newspaper's offices in Washington and Western capitals may also be linked to attacks on American targets in Saudi Arabia.





Arms deadlock

South and North clash over disarmament, reports **Gamil Ibrahim** from Geneva

Talks aimed at banning anti-personnel mines and the production of materials used to make nuclear weapons dominated the UN Disarmament Conference (UNDC) held in Geneva this week. The 61-nation conference is the world's only international forum for disarmament. Having completed work last year, on a treaty to ban nuclear weapons tests, the conference opened its 1997 session, Tuesday on the lookout for a new weapon "ripe" for a treaty.

Addressing the conference in a keynote speech, Italian Foreign Minister, Lamberto Dini, told the assembled delegates that his country was preparing to impose a moratorium on the production of anti-personnel land-mines and would destroy existing stockpiles. Dini also urged the UNDC member states to ban the production of all materials used to manufacture nuclear weapons, such as plutonium and enriched uranium.

The talks were marked by long-standing differences between the nuclear powers, led by the US, France, Britain, Russia and China, and the G-21 non-aligned countries: the nuclear powers refuse to ban the manufacturing of nuclear materials used in the arms industry, while insisting on imposing a moratorium on the production of anti-personnel land-mines, but the G21 countries maintain that the two issues should be linked. The G-21 countries — including India and Pakistan — are seeking to link fissile materials negotiations to a commitment, on the part of the five major self-declared nuclear powers, to eliminate their arsenals by a cut-off deadline.

In his address to the last UN General Assembly session in New York, US President Bill Clinton clearly stated the American position. Sidelining the sensitive issue of nuclear weapons production, which Washington is not about to give up, Clinton focused instead on the threat of rampant nuclear proliferation and the evil caused by land-mines. "We must end the carnage caused by anti-personnel land-mines, the hidden killers that murder and maim more than 25,000 people a year," he said, emphasising that the US has imposed a moratorium on manufacturing land-mines since 1992.

Wolfgang Hoffman, the German delegate at the UNDC, maintained that Germany had followed the American lead. He said that Germany had unconditionally announced in April, 1996, that it would stop producing anti-personnel mines and destroy existing stocks by the end of the year.

It was Canada that launched the initiative to prohibit land-mine production last October, by obtaining the support of 50 countries for the drafting of a global ban on anti-personnel land mines. But, Western diplomats, requesting anonymity, said that the major flaw in the Canadian strategy is that China and Russia — both major land-mine producers — have refused to participate in the ban, though they might be prevailed upon to accept a slower 'step-by-step' approach.

Expressing the concerns of many countries in the South, including the G-21 countries, Egyptian Ambassador Mounir Zahran said that Egypt agreed with the need to curtail land-mine production, especially since an estimated 23 million land-mines are still buried in the country's soil — lethal remnants of foreign power conflicts during World War II and of the various Egyptian-Israeli wars. Zahran added that measures aiming at curbing land-mines should also take the technical and financial requirements of mine-clearing into consideration.

The Egyptian ambassador, however, opposed a moratorium, saying that national security concerns should be taken into consideration given that some countries rely on land-mines for self-defence. Zahran added that nuclear disarmament had for decades featured on conference agendas, without producing tangible results, since nuclear-weapon states still refuse to set a time-table for disarmament. "We recognise that two nuclear-weapon states, namely the US and the Russian Federation, have indeed carried out positive bilateral steps in this direction," explained Zahran, "but there is also no denying that nuclear-weapon states have yet to commit themselves to a concrete time-bound frame of nuclear disarmament for the realisation of their commitment to the so-called 'ultimate' objective of nuclear disarmament."

Chechnyan mouse roars

Islam emerged as a rallying force in the run-up to Chechnya's presidential elections this week, reports **Abdel-Malik Khalil** from Moscow


Aslan Maskhadov *(photo: AFP)*

The battle for Chechnyan independence has shifted from the military to the political arena. Standing up to Moscow's military might and political pressure, Chechnyans are expected to elect a pro-independence presidential candidate into office this week. The three leading presidential contenders advocate Chechnyan independence while reactivating Chechnya's oil industry is seen as the main economic priority. Now restricted to small black market operations, Chechnya could become the Kuwait of the Caucasus Mountains if its oil industry were to be developed to its fullest potential.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) dispatched 72 observers to monitor the Chechnyan presidential and parliamentary elections. Presidential candidates need 50 per cent of the vote to win outright. If no one reaches this mark, a run-off election between the two top vote scorers will be held in February. To prevent multiple voting, the OSCE provided an indelible ink which was sprayed on the hand of every Chechen who cast a ballot. Ethnic Russians who resided in Chechnya but fled the country at the onset of the war were not eligible to cast their votes.

There are many in Chechnya who demand war reparations for the atrocities and crimes committed against the Chechnyan people by Russian troops. The war for Chechnyan independence has claimed the lives of between 50,000 and 100,000 Chechnyans. All the presidential hopefuls are heroes and veterans of the war against the Russians. They all uphold the banner of Islam as the rallying cry of Chechnyan independence. Notwithstanding the widespread devastation caused by the war, most Chechens appear optimistic about the political and economic prospects of the tiny Muslim republic.

Who were the main contenders in the elections? Aslan Maskhadov established a record as a flexible negotiator during talks with Russian authorities to end the 21-month war waged by the Chechens to drive the Russians out of their country. He was born in the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan, at a time when the Chechen people were deported to Central Asia on Stalin's orders. Maskadov is seen by Western observers as the most pragmatic and moderate Islamist of the Chechen presidential candidates. He is a favourite of the Russians too. Moscow feels that with Maskhadov as president of Chechnya, Russian interests in the war-torn Caucasian republic will be best secured. Likewise, Moscow believes that Maskhadov will not lead Chechnya to full independence.

Hot on Maskhadov's heels is the nationalist Shamil Basayev. Hated in Moscow, the young firebrand is wanted as a terrorist by the Russian authorities for leading a hostage-taking assault on the southern Russian city of Budennovsk in June 1995. This operation forced the Russians to sit at the negotiating table with the Chechen separatists. Militant Chechen voters feel that Basayev is the best man to lead the troubled republic to independence from Moscow. Basayev's vociferous anti-Russian rhetoric and militant Islamist views have won him many backers among the young and radical who respect him for standing up against the Russians. Moscow, on the other hand, is terrified at the prospect of Basayev becoming the next Chechen president and knows that a Basayev victory will lead to confrontation and possibly to the secession of Chechnya from the Russian Federation.

Acting Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev has been the effective Chechen political leader since the Russian military killed former Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev. Dudayev is the man who declared Chechen independence shortly before the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 thus prompting the war with Russia. Yandarbiyev is seen as a man of ideas rather than actions. Yandarbiyev, like most of the other presidential candidates, has stressed his devotion to Islam and the institution of an Islamic order.

Apart from choosing a new president, Chechen voters were electing representatives for the 63-seat Chechen parliament. Some 500,000 Chechen voters had registered from an eligible 700,000. Western observers, who were under 24-hour surveillance because radicals had threatened to kill them, noted that the turnout was impressive. Voting began Monday, 27 January at 7:00am and lasted until 8:00pm. While official results will be announced tomorrow, preliminary results on Tuesday showed that Maskhadov emerged as the outright winner of Monday's presidential elections. He got at least 55 per cent of the vote. Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin promised that the Russians and the new Chechen president, "will sit around a table to begin working together."

Maskhadov, Moscow's preferred choice, was ironically the commander-in-chief of the Chechen resistance. A former Soviet artillery officer, he is known to be against the institution of Islamist rule in Chechnya, even though his Islamic credentials are impeccable. Maskhadov is also known to be keen on starting talks with the Russian authorities to settle the Chechen crisis peacefully.

He nevertheless wants to strengthen the Chechen army in order to " demonstrate that we Chechens are a real army, not bandits the way the international media say we are."

The main candidates differed in style and approach, yet they all want to lead Chechnya to full independence. They want the tiny republic of some 1.5 million people to be free from Moscow's political and economic stranglehold. Moscow, however, wants to keep the predominantly Muslim Chechnyan republic within the Russian Federation.

The cash-strapped Chechen economy is dependent on oil production and refining and the use of Chechen territory as an outlet for oil produced in neighbouring Azerbaijan. Land-locked Chechnya needs an economic stability that can only be guaranteed by a permanent end to the war and a return of the flow of Azeri oil across Chechnya. Consequently, the Chechens want the oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to traverse Georgia, skipping Russia altogether. Chechnya itself produces some oil, but oil refining has almost ground to a halt because of the war, even though some Chechen and Azeri oil is refined and sold in black markets in Chechnya and neighbouring countries.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Flying high

Parliamentarian and entrepreneur, Mohamed Abul-Einein argues that the emerging market in Egypt presents an opportunity to be seized. Gamal Nkrumah and Nagwa El-Akkad speak to one of the country's most dynamic businessmen



Mohamed Abul-Einein, like so many self-made men, is a confessed workaholic. Only someone accustomed to smoothly carrying off stressful deals would choose flying — a demanding sport if ever there was one — as a hobby. But Abul-Enein is no amateur with a yen for the open skies: he has a pilot's licence. He is an ambitious, assertive man who wants to participate in his country's economic development and he knows that, as a successful entrepreneur, a member of both the People's Assembly and the American-Egyptian Presidents' Council, he is in a unique position to do so. Influential in business, he has the political pull to lobby effectively for the economic policies he believes will be beneficial.

"We need to think big in Egypt. If we think small, we shall not succeed in achieving our goals. Egypt embraces the idea of globalisation of the world economy," he states passionately. He is cautious nevertheless. "Globalisation can overwhelm us and be detrimental to our national interests if we do not have clear national objectives," he warns.

Abul-Einein acknowledges that the economic performance of Egypt and the entire Middle Eastern region remains wedded to the success of the Arab-Israeli peace process. "There can be no regional cooperation without a comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East. We need to press ahead with the idea of Arab economic cooperation."

There is still a long way to go, but he is optimistic about the future. "We are determined to raise international investors' returns without raising their risks. This is how we can best attract foreign capital. The right of acquisition of land and estate regardless of nationality is now guaranteed by Egyptian law. That was not the case a few years ago," he added.

He sees increased economic cooperation between Egypt and the United States as pivotal in Egypt's economic progress. The Egyptian-American Presidents' Council is influential in promoting lucrative trade between Egypt and America. "The whole idea is centred around creating a forum to bring together businessmen from Egypt and America on a regular basis. The main goal is to market Egyptian products in America. Another objective is to increase the overall volume of trade between the United States and Egypt," explains Abul-Einein.

"Naturally there are problems," he admits; but he is convinced that there is the political will in both countries to make prompt, decisive solutions possible. "The concept of the American-Egyptian Presidents' Council itself must be marketed and its positive role must be better publicised in Egypt and the United States," Abul-Einein says. "American and Egyptian companies must cooperate closely. There is a lot of room for joint ventures between Egyptian and American firms. We see Egypt and the US as complementary to one another."

As head of Cleopatra Ceramics, Abul-Einein is one of the leading manufacturers of ceramics in Egypt and the Middle East. He is also involved in several other industrial, commercial and agricultural concerns around the country. He is involved in the construction of a huge tourist complex near Quseir, south of Safaga. The new complex will cover an area of some 5.8 million square metres and several tourist villages will be built. The project will cost over a billion Egyptian pounds. Abul-Einein also has other tourism concerns near Hurghada, where he is investing in several three-star and four-star hotels with a combined capacity of some 300 hotel rooms and 120 chalets or seaside villas. A marina and airport are to be built as part of the tourist complex.

He has also branched out, into agricultural development. "I am involved in agricultural projects in three areas — Sahel Tiba, Al-Nubariya and Wadi Al-Mullak. The crops grown are mainly fruit, citrus, pears and apples as well as potatoes and other vegetables," he says.

There are new tax-free industrial zones springing up all over the country, and Abul-Enein is involved in the development of some of the duty-free zones. "The Fum Al-Khalig Free Zone in the Suez area is designed to attract investment and foreign capital. It is designed to boost both tourism projects and industrial development in the Suez Canal and Sinai areas between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The new legislation guarantees basic infrastructural development in the area and agricultural, commercial and industrial projects in the vicinity of Suez," he says.

His own ventures are proof, to him, that cooperation need not mean dependence. "We, in Egypt, do not want to be dependent on American aid. We do, however, want to triple the volume of trade with the US. America has capital and ultra-modern technology in abundance. Egypt has a skilful, cheap, abundant labour force," Abul-Einein explains.

"We must take advantage of Western investors who are vigorously pursuing trading opportunities with emerging markets in the Third World," he adds. "First, I want to stress that we in Egypt are serious about privatising and liberalising the Egyptian economy. We do not want to be excluded from the critically important changes in world trade patterns that have taken place in the past few years. We are determined to increase production and productivity," he notes.

"Egypt guarantees investors' rights. It encourages investment in all sectors of the economy. Profits can be transferred abroad at any time without any restrictions. The investor takes advantage of the large Egyptian market, the vast natural resources and huge labour reservoir in Egypt. Today, the investor can also take advantage of liberal investment laws. There are now no fundamental differences in the treatment of foreign and local investors. Foreign investment is encouraged and the laws of the land have been changed to accommodate the latest global economic trends." Abul-Einein speaks of the continuing need to "improve the competitiveness of the Egyptian economic system," and he is aware that advocating a more liberal economy entails accepting its consequences.

"The Middle East and North Africa economic conference was a wedding procession to show off Egypt's commitment to the new global business-focused environment. It highlighted the new laws and new economic deregulation regimes. The message to the investor was that Egypt is a country that welcomes foreign capital and investment in all sectors."

But Abul-Einein recognises the need for a long-term strategic perspective. "We do not just want quick returns on our investments. Infusions from foreign investors who have faith in Egypt's economic future are trickling in and the trickle must become a flow," he elaborates. "The new companies law and a new securities law are a welcome change. We are working on new moves designed to integrate new capital legislation into the civil code and to strengthen shareholder rights. We are also working on easing registration problems for foreign and domestic firms."

Taking into consideration the guarantees safeguarding private investment in Egypt, the new economic objective is clear. How to attract foreign capital and modern technology? "By bringing in multinationals. The social environment is rapidly changing in Egypt and is now more conducive to business. Today, the average Egyptian citizen is for foreign investment. There was a time when the general climate was unfavourable to foreign capital. People did not trust the foreigners who invested in Egypt and were suspicious of their motives. Today, Egyptian investors are getting together with foreign investors and are embarking on lucrative industrial, commercial and agricultural ventures. The new investment codes are designed to attract foreign capital. This is an advantage that must be highlighted and marketed abroad," says Abul-Einein.

It is difficult to see how such a keen businessman has time to do politics as well. But, somehow, Abul-Einein manages. "I am deeply involved in the decision-making process. I am a member of the Economic Committee of the People's Assembly and of the Assembly's Industrial Committee." As a politician and a parliamentarian, he is, of course, close to the centre of the decision-making process. "I attend all the debates that concern economic policy. Egypt's business community should have a big say in the direction the Egyptian economy should take. Businessmen's ideas are the key to the shaping of Egyptian economic policy," he asserts. "A message must go out from Egypt to advertise the country's promising economic potential. Egypt is not yet properly marketed abroad. The investment opportunities in the country are there, but a comprehensive investment map of Egypt is long overdue," he notes. On a promising note, new legislation has cleared the way for the creation of new pools of foreign capital that can be invested productively in the emerging Egyptian market. "The liberalisation of our economy will help address the problem of bureaucracy and red tape that frustrates potential investors. Our investment codes and economic and commercial laws must take into account the globalisation factor. But the introduction of these new laws entail in-depth study and thorough analysis of our specific socio-economic situation. Research is needed before the new laws are promulgated," Abul-Einein cautions.

The opening of the Egyptian economy by lowering tariffs on imported capital goods makes cheap access to imported technology easy for Egyptian firms. The average tariffs on imports to Egypt used to be 42 per cent. They now stand at 25 per cent. The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), however, stipulates that tariffs must be decreased to 18 per cent. Abul-Einein feels that multinational corporations play a vital role in technology transfer from the developed to the developing world, and he is lobbying for lower tariffs on capital goods and other items. "The average trade-weighted external tariff is still very high today. There is a need to cut tariffs sharply. Tariffs on many items will start falling in the coming few years. A plan is to be revealed soon that will bring down the average tariff on some 5,000 commodities," he explains.

"Privatisation and economic deregulation had a very favourable impact on the performance of Egyptian companies in the Cairo Stock Exchange," he notes. Unlike many other advocates of liberalisation, however, Abul-Einein feels that there is a place for the public sector in Egypt's rapid industrialisation and economic transformation. "The involvement of the public sector in infrastructural development is more necessary than ever. The public sector has a vital role to play in the country's infrastructural base — road construction, the building of modern port and airport facilities," he says.

A number of phones sit atop Abul-Einein's enormous desk. They are constantly buzzing. Usually, he does not speak for long. He gets straight to the point and then politely bids the caller good-bye. But his face lit up when he answered one particular call. His son Tarek was reminding him of an appointment to fly over Cairo. Tarek shares his father's passion for flying. "For relaxation I play tennis and chess and I love to fly when I can. I am a pilot, after all," he chuckles.

PA fears textile industry worn out

Patching up Egypt's frayed textile industry was the focus of debates in the People's Assembly's Industrial Committee, writes Gamal Essam El-Din

The future of the textile industry, one of Egypt's oldest key industries, has taken centre stage in the People's Assembly's Industrial Committee. Last week, in a bid to seek out means of increasing the sector's technical and marketing capacity ahead of the complete liberalisation of the foreign trade market in the next century, a group of MPs, economists and government industrial experts gathered at the PA's Industrial Committee. Their debates, which came as part of a series of hearing sessions organised by the Industrial Committee to review the challenges encountered by Egypt' industrial sector as a whole, highlighted a number of negative domestic and international factors that have led to the accumulation of heavy financial losses sustained by public and private sector textile producers in Egypt.

Painting a gloomy picture of the industry's future, Fathi Nimatallah, an MP for the major textile producing district of Shubra El-Kheima (North Cairo), pointed out that the 23 public sector textile firms had incurred losses of LE1.379 billion by the end of June 1996, up from LE732 million the previous fiscal year. Moreover, he added, debts owed by these firms to banks had reached a record high of LE2.267 billion by late 1996. Nimatallah, who is also a board member of the Holding Company for Spinning and Weaving, attributed these losses to three main factors, the first and foremost being the dramatic increase in the price of cotton due to recent state-imposed agricultural sector liberalisation reforms. The other key factors he cited were shoddy equipment and unskilled labour, as well as the illegal importing of textiles and an import system which exempts large private sector textile producers from paying customs duties and sales tax on imported yarn cotton.

"We could withstand these conditions provided that they would be offset by an increase in cotton exports," he said. "But even these export levels have remained exceedingly modest over the last two months." According to Nimatallah, the last season's volume of cotton exports amounted to only 111,000 qantars, or 8.5 per cent of all export contracts signed by cotton-exporting companies.

But, says Magdi El-Aref, president of the Cotton Consolidation Fund, the roots of the problem can be traced back to the 1960s. "At that time, public sector textile producing companies were divided into two groups in terms of exporting yarn cotton and textiles.," said El-Aref. The first group of companies, such as the Middle Egypt Spinning and Weaving Company, El-Nasr Spinning, Weaving and Knitting Company and Etablissment Industriel Pour la Soie et le Coton (ESCO), which entirely depended on the Eastern bloc countries (including the former Soviet Union) for export markets, have almost collapsed following the break-up of the Soviet Union. These companies, he added, are plagued by ineffective marketing systems and machinery.

The other group, which includes such companies as the Misr Spinning and Weaving and El-Nasr Wool and Selected Textile (Stia) have, over the years, managed to tap successfully into different Western European and North American markets.

"In the 1960s, they began by exporting around 8,000 tons of yarn cotton, and very recently, they were able to realise an export quota of 55,000 tons of yarn cotton and 25,000 tons of cloth with the European Union (EU)," stated El-Aref. "Moreover, they also export 90,000 tons of yarn cotton, 80,000 square metres of cloth and 150,000 tons of textile products to North and South America out of a total textile production estimated at 240,000 tons."

However, he contended, the mixed effect of liberalising local cotton prices and the drop in the international price of cotton, as a result of a surge in production in Pakistan, China and India, not only led to a severe decline in Egyptian cotton exports, but also forced textile companies to offer what they did export at reduced prices.

"So far, public textile companies have only exported 50 per cent of the export quota agreed upon with the EU, and a mere 10 per cent of the total exported to North and South America," said El-Aref.

Also discussing the textile industry's future, El-Motaz-Billah Abdel-Maqsoud, chairman of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in El-Mahalla El-Kobra, was more optimistic about the sector's future. Abdel-Maqsoud, who is also deputy chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI), noted that the problems plaguing the Egyptian textile industry stem from the cotton itself, which still accounts for as much as 85 per cent of the industry's inputs. Currently, he pointed out, the majority of the world's textile producers have reduced their dependence on cotton to a mere 45 per cent, meaning that the remaining 55 per cent of inputs used in textile production are synthetics.

"Synthetic fibres are not only substantially cheaper and more readily available than cotton, but can be easily controlled unlike cotton which is susceptible to changing weather conditions," said the FEI deputy chairman.

Last year, he elaborated, an LE120 per qantar increase in the price of cotton cost public sector textile firms an excess of LE125 million. His company alone, stated Abdel-Maqsoud, lost as much as LE40 million because it "was forced to purchase cotton at higher prices and sell yarn cotton at reduced prices."

"In the new season, however, the amount by which the price of cotton increased has dropped by nearly 90 per cent, while our companies were successfully able to secure full capacity export contract for yarn cotton until next July," he added.

Touching on the issue of outdated or worn-out machinery, Abdel-Maqsoud stated that the factories of a number of public sector textile companies have been upgraded and improved, while others will be leased to a number of European textile investors with the aim of improving their performance.

"The Misr/Helwan and El-Daqahliya Spinning and Weaving Companies will be leased to Italian investors for LE30 million per year, with the promise that as much as LE180 million will be invested in them over the next five years," he stated. "This investment will also include extensive training for the employees."

Market report

Smiles for the GMI

THE CAPITAL Market's General Market Index reached new heights this week, up to 355.31 points, for the seven-day period ending 23 January. The value of transactions increased from LE261 million the previous week to LE441 million.. Experts attributed the GMI's surge to the impressive rating accorded to Egypt last week by the US rating agency, Standard & Poor's.

General Market Index for the week ending 23 January

390
360
330
300
19/1/97 20/1/97 21/1/97 22/1/97 23/1/97

Floating 2.3 million shares over the course of the week, the Misr Free Shops (MFS) led the market in terms of value and volume of shares traded. With trading of its shares accounting for 21 per cent of total market turnover, LE93.4 million in stock changed hands. The shares went for LE40, LE10 more than the minimum price set by MFS's parent company, the Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema.

Also in the trading spotlight was the Financial and Industrial Company, whose shares increased in value by LE41.77, up 31 per cent over their opening price, and closed at LE176 per share. Sharing the limelight, once again, were the milling companies. While all six of the companies recorded gains, it was Middle Egypt Mills who led the pack with a 30.41 per cent increase in share value and a closing price of LE63.25.

Housing companies registered similar gains, with the Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation Company gaining LE54 per share to level off at LE525, while the Medinat Nasr Housing and Urbanisation Company's shares inched up by LE8 to close at LE423.

In the financial sector, the Egyptian-Saudi Finance Bank stood out as the market's big winner in terms of an increase in share value. Gaining 39 per cent, the bank's stock closed at LE37.49, while that of the Credit International Bank closed at LE512 after opening at LE468.

In all, the shares of 63 companies increased in value, 12 decreased and 29 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

New privatisation slate

ACCORDING to a decision taken by the ministerial privatisation committee, headed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, new tranches in 29 companies are scheduled to be put up for sale during the first half of 1997. The committee met earlier this week to lay out the privatisation plan for the first half of the year.

Atef Ebeid, the public sector minister, announced that the new tranches of nine companies will be put up for sale to increase the private ownership of these companies to over 51 per cent. The companies include Egypt Chemical Industries, the Paint and Chemical Industries, Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation, the United Arab for Spinning and Weaving, Alexandria Spinning and Weaving, Extracted Oils, the Eastern Company, El-Nasr Clothing and Textiles Company and Nile Pharmaceuticals.

The committee has also decided to place additional tranches of another 20 companies which had previously sold some of their shares. This would raise the share of private ownership of these countries to 90 per cent.

هكذا من الأصل

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Southern Egypt suffered from chronic neglect, primarily from the government, for many decades in the 19th and 20th centuries — a phenomenon that prompted President Hosni Mubarak to initiate major reforms and development plans for the region in recent years. For a quarter of a century after its founding in 1876, *Al-Ahram*'s interest in peasant affairs was concentrated on the Nile Delta in northern Egypt. As if in remorse, the newspaper began shifting its attention to the peasants of southern Egypt in 1903. Dr Yunan Labib Rizk tells the story in this instalment of his *Diwan* series based on reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Since it was founded in 1876, *Al-Ahram* demonstrated its support for the concerns of the Egyptian peasants of the Nile Delta in northern Egypt. Indeed, because of its outspoken stance on this issue, the newspaper was almost closed down in April 1879. Then, nearly two decades later, the articles written by its correspondent in Damanhur triggered a clash between *Al-Ahram* and the pro-British *Al-Muqattam*. Yet, as intense as its concern was for the Egyptian peasant, the newspaper tended to focus exclusively on the problems of the *fellahin* in the Delta. As though in regret for its slight to the south, it devoted its editions from 4 March to 15 July 1903 to a series of articles on the conditions in Upper Egypt.

Al-Ahram never revealed the true identity of the author of these articles, which were signed "A *fellah* from the Delta touring Upper Egypt." However, his style of writing and familiarity with the journalistic jargon of the times suggests that this was no ordinary *fellah*, if he was a *fellah* at all. One suspects, rather, that he was one of the newspaper's more industrious reporters, most likely one who had been based in the Delta so as to be able to draw the necessary comparisons.

The comparisons, in general, were quite favourable to the *fellahin* of the north. For example, our "Delta *fellah*" wrote, "The Upper Egyptian peasants are far worse off than those in the north who enjoy a greater degree of freedom and access to the modern trappings of civilisation. They are able to catch the ear of advisers to the ministries and they have at their disposal the postal system and the telegraph to facilitate the communication of their complaints. Those Delta peasants enjoy great freedom and vaunt it in every field of endeavour."

The Upper Egyptian peasant, by contrast, "is subjected to the tyranny, fraud and greed of the usurers, the despotism and oppression inflicted upon him by the landowners, and the price swindling and theft of their crops by the merchants. They fare no better in the awesome halls of the government administration and the courts, where, should they contemplate redress, they are overwhelmed by mountains of laws and regulations."

As the "*fellah*" himself notes on one occasion during his voyage. "I have begun to read Magdi Bek's memoirs on his journey through Upper Egypt, which, I believe, is the only such work in Arabic, although such works written in foreign languages are innumerable."

The Magdi Bek he was referring to here was most likely one of the students of Mohamed El-Rifa'a El-Tahtawi, Saleh Magdi, a prolific writer who is said to have produced some 65 books among which was an account of his travels in Upper Egypt.

Whether or not it was his explicit intention, the fact that the writer of the articles stressed the uniqueness of his voyage not only underscores the lack of concern for Upper Egypt among literary circles, but the neglect of that extensive portion of the country on the part of the government. So depressed were conditions there that Egyptians from the north who were posted there for military or civil work saw it as a form of punishment. It also explains why there has always been a steady course of migration northwards, while migration southwards, if only for short stretches of time, were rare.

One such exception, of course, was our anonymous author, who, in the introduction to his series explains to his readers his motives for undertaking his journey. One reason of course would attract any of us in winter. It was "to enjoy the pleasant weather." Again, like many today, he was "eager to see the many ancient treasures abounding in every hill and valley, where temples, tombs and other ruins are fully visible while many others remain concealed in the folds of the earth." Finally, he was simply lured by the spirit of adventure, particularly when travel had become so easy. "Whereas in the past it would take months to reach these parts, now we have trains going and coming, not to mention the deluxe express with its sleeping cars, smoking salons and dining cars."

Needless to say, our traveller was perfectly well aware that he would have to leave some of these comforts behind once he alighted from the train. The place he had chosen for his base was Girga. He had learned through his research that this Upper Egyptian town "had once been the capital of the Directorate of Girga and a major centre of learning and religious studies. Time, however, has let it fall into neglect so that now it is little more than a provincial town, although it retains vestiges of its past splendour."

The business at hand, however, was to study the conditions of the southern Egyptian *fellah* and the writer's immediate reaction was that "he is wretched, wretched, a thousand times wretched." This poor man, he said, "is an industrious and tireless worker, but he is entirely dispossessed of any rights and privileges. He is hired at a piastre a day to do the work that would kill a beast of burden. His food is appalling and his clothes are of the crudest material and this he can only afford to change once every few years, after it has become so worn and shredded that it disintegrates and its fragments flap in the wind. Two-thirds of the land in this part is owned by a handful of landlords while the remaining third is distributed among millions. O men of justice and law, behold this inequity!"

The source of this misery, according to the man from the Delta, lay in the corruption that permeated the government bureaucracy. To this subject he addressed the bulk of his series — five instalments — under the heading: "The hidden secrets of government administration in the south."

The administrative hierarchy he describes as consisting of "a district director, a district police commissioner, a superintendent, various aides and soldiers. The jurisdiction of the district director covers all the villages, hamlets and estates in this district, along with their sheikhs, village mayors, sentinels, and many inhabitants. He is responsible for overseeing the public welfare and supervises the activities of his employees and the people under his command, particularly the sheikhs, village mayors and sentinels who are responsible for the preservation of law and order and the well-being of the populace."

The individual vested with such responsibilities, according to the author, should possess certain important traits: "He should be virtuous, honest, diligent, politically astute and thoroughly familiar with every aspect of administrative affairs." However, he observed that such individuals were extremely rare and that generally the reverse was true. Widespread abuse of office "has brought calamity and misery" to the people, he said, adding that the majority of district directors "have no fear of God."

In the pursuit of their personal interests, these officials resort to the basest tactics. Instead of maintaining the impartiality of office, they fuel antagonisms between the villagers and side with some over others, entirely disrupting the affairs of the villagers, and putting him in a position to dismiss the village mayors. Then, "once this position is vacant, the provincial directorate entrusts him with the selection of a new village mayor. The petitioners are many and they are prepared to go to any expense in order to secure this post and have no reservations in pawning or selling off 10 feddans or so of their land toward that end. If their aim in so doing is not to acquire prestige, then it is to be in a position to avenge themselves on their adversaries." This rivalry, which the district director exploits, is the source of all ills, leading to murder, arson, the poisoning of livestock, theft and burglary and, given his tendentious manipulations, the innocent becomes the accused and the perpetrator walks free according to the writer.

The "*fellah* from the Delta" reported so many incidents of crime and corruption related to him by his hosts in the village that some of them formed a separate chapter in the series. For example, the instalment appearing in *Al-Ahram* on 4 May 1903 was devoted in its entirety to bribery among government officials. In his article, entitled "An agonising wound in the body of the country," the author observed: "Bribery is still widespread among officials in all government departments who are prepared to devour the rights of the people and tear down the pillars of justice all for the sake of a glittering piece of gold." The author then describes the mechanics of bribery in the southern administrative departments and the portrait he offers is not much different from such practices today. It was the practice of the senior rural officials to hire a private secretary whose actual function was to act as an intermediary between the official and the local businessmen. "If you have any legal transactions to conduct in this district, you have to meet with this solicitous intermediary and tell him your problems and your needs. If he starts signalling rapidly with his fingers, you will know that this is an indication of a certain sum. Thus, be prepared with a generous purse and luxurious gifts if you have any interests at stake."

The only solution, according to *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Upper Egypt, is to dismiss those corrupt officials and to ascertain that their positions are filled "with individuals of high integrity, moral virtue and fairness." In particular, he recommends younger candidates who have had a modern education and are, therefore, "cognisant of the laws and the soundness of the liberal principles on which they are founded." Specifically, he says, young administrative officials who have a degree in law would be ideal.

Having shifted the discussion to other elements in the class structure of Upper Egypt, the "Delta *fellah*" embarks on a portrait of Upper Egyptian society in general. At the upper echelons of this society are the merchants, landed gentry and rural notables. Not long before our *Al-Ahram* correspondent travelled south, this corner of Upper Egypt had been a staging post for caravans coming from central and western Sudan. When the campaign to capture Dongola escalated into a full-fledged expedition to overturn the Mahdist state, the movement of Egyptian and British forces southwards caused commerce to boom. The "Delta *fellah*" noted that most of the merchants were Copts and he was particularly impressed by their business acumen, as though "success shadowed them in every step of commercial activity."

The "Delta *fellah*" was not as sympathetic to the rural dignitaries and notables. He had earlier noted the gross disparity in the distribution of land between this small group of large landowners and the bulk of the *fellahin*. According to academic studies, two sources contributed to the demographic composition of this class. The first was bedouins from the Himam Al-Farshuti tribe who, as a result of their constant harassment and encroachment on this area during the Ottoman period, were able, by the end of the 18th century, to secure ownership of a major portion of the land. The other source consisted of those Coptic merchants who were able to invest their wealth in acquiring vast tracts of agricultural land.

This was the class which, to the "Delta *fellah*", was the source of his particular *bête noire*: rampant government corruption in the south. "The village mayors and rural dignitaries and notables" were responsible for buying the conscience of the district commissioner and other government functionaries. Indeed, one observes that the affluent notable does not even have to be acquainted with a provincial director or on good terms with a district commissioner in order to approach the lesser government functionaries and open his purse to purchase their help."

Lower down in the social hierarchy was the class of *effendis* or government functionaries, a goodly segment of which merited the author's praise, while for others he reserved a certain scorn. The family which hosted the "Delta *fellah*" in Girga, contained some of those younger elements who had received a modern education. The author was particularly impressed by the contribution they made to various discussions and recorded them in his articles verbatim. On one such occasion, the son of his hosts, "a student of modern sciences," remarked during a conversation on government corruption, "If it is truly the case that liberty extends throughout the country and that there are no constraints on the freedom to write, then we should expose all those injustices that are inflicted upon the wretched people whose ignorance prevents them from complaining and disclosing the flaws of the rulers." Indeed, it was such noble sentiments that prompted the author to focus on this aspect of life in the south to begin with. But not all members of this class subscribed to such lofty principles. Lawyers in particular are the subject of his ontempt for their tendency to exploit the ignorance of the Upper Egyptian *fellahin* and "to drag them into lengthy litigation that bleeds them of every piastre without any tangible result." He recounts one incident of an elderly peasant who had been duped into forfeiting some of his property. The peasant sought the help of these lawyers, "who swore that the peasant would win his case." The *fellah* paid repeated visits to the lawyer in order to learn the progress of his case, and on every occasion he was told that the court had postponed its ruling, until finally, on one occasion, the lawyer told him that the court had ruled against him and that he should appeal. "The case has been in appeal for several months and the elderly man complains, 'I can no longer call on the lawyer to ask him about the progress of my trial, because every time I visit him he kicks me out of his office and tells me you're an ignorant old man who doesn't understand anything!'"

Also subject to disapproval of the "Delta *fellah*" were the spoiled sons of the affluent families who squandered away their time in the pursuit of "amusement and romantic attachments."

The only way to improve the lot of southern peasants, one author wrote, "is through the acquisition of science and knowledge, the best vehicle to achieve progress and the true manifestations of civilisation." Toward this end, they should "use modern agricultural machinery and inventions for planting, ploughing and harvesting so as to compound your wealth with riches." In addition, they should "form companies to corner the market in the trade of your produce, enabling you to garner the profits that foreigners make, for you are more deserving than they of the fruits of your crops." Finally, and perhaps more importantly, he urges a campaign to fight illiteracy. "Ninety-eight per cent of you are still illiterate and unaware of the potential wealth and power you possess. Build technical and agricultural schools, for this is the key to meet your desperate need for agricultural reform."



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

French medicine for Iraq

A HIGH-ranking French official stated that contracts have been signed recently between French companies and Iraq to sell urgently-needed medicine to Iraq. These contracts are the first to be signed since the easing of the embargo a month ago. The unidentified French companies operate in the framework of the UN's oil-for-food deal, which allows Iraq to sell a portion of its oil in return for medicine and food urgently needed by the Iraqi people.

The French official did not reveal the details of the deal, but stated that the value of the contracts is low.







German locomotive project in crisis

THE GERMAN transport minister stated that foreign investment in Germany will save the German Express locomotive from downfall. He added that investors should form a consortium to lessen the risks involved in the project.

The 400km/h locomotive is the latest presented by German industry, the downfall of which will be an embarrassment for the German government which is providing 6 billion marks as financing for the project.

The possibility of a further increase in the cost of the project may result in canceling the project.

Chamber expects remarkable activities this year

MAMDOUH Thabit Mekki, deputy head of the Federation of Industries and undersecretary at the Cairo Chamber of Commerce said that the forthcoming period is expected to witness remarkable activities for the chamber, especially in light of industrialists, businessmen and new association heads being chosen to sit on the boards of chambers of commerce across the nation.

This board selection comes at a time when chambers of commerce are expanding their role to help boost the national economy especially in the field of exports. Mekki emphasised the important role of industrialists, and that production is one of the mainstays of trade. He further emphasised the strong ties that bind industrial and trade activities, which will in turn bring developments to chambers of commerce in all governorates conforming to the weight of the role carried by the General Federation of Chambers of Commerce, considered one of the largest entities comprised of businessmen, providing them with excellent representation.

Regarding the Egyptian Federation of Industries, Mekki said it is implementing a strategy aimed at reviving Egyptian industry and developing the volume of exports until they reach a level that will add to the weight of Egypt's political and economic impact in the region.

Mekki pointed out that Egyptian products have qualities suitable for competition in the global arena through industries such as leather tanning and its products, which are in great demand in foreign markets. Egyptian quality and workmanship is also recognised in such industries as furniture, ready-made clothing, ceramic, carpets, and more. Mekki affirmed the importance of these industries, saying that a suitable environment must be created in order for these industries to thrive and develop. He explained that moving tanneries to New Badr City will bring about a technological and industrial revolution, which will provide job opportunities and increase production volume.

Mekki added that time is a factor, for implementing these projects with the utmost speed will be key in attracting new markets for Egyptian goods.

Mekki explained that the vision of the federation is to provide Egypt with a new generation of small industries and investors. To realise this, he explained, it is absolutely necessary to reduce the amount of tariffs and taxes. "We are not refuting what the Ganzouri government has and is still implementing," he said. "Rather, we are trying to remove the 'routine' in order to pave the way for more investors and businessmen to operate in the new cities and elsewhere. The government will examine the obstacles facing industrialists, investors and businessmen and as a result, the forthcoming period will witness important developments in providing greater opportunity for development and investment in Egypt."

National project includes Sinai

THE EGYPTIAN government has finally approved a national project for Sinai as part of the ongoing national social and economic projects. The project aims at developing Sinai to lead the Egyptian economy to interact with the chain of political, and economical changes taking place within Egypt's borders, in addition to its interaction with the world in general. North Sinai plays a great role in the national project, for it is perceived as an area where agriculture, industry, and tourism can fully develop and prosper, which, in the end, will increase job opportunities and thus enhance national security.

Governor of North Sinai Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ghaiati said that North Sinai will be on the world tourism agenda in the near future, especially now that the governorate, in cooperation with the Faculty of Engineering and Technology at Suez Canal University, have planned a giant touristic city to be located east of Arish City. The new city will have a total area of 21 million square metres. The city is expected to host other tourist villages with various architectures expressive of the Egyptian, Arab and Bedouin cultures. The city will also have yachting marinas, airstrips, a conference and exhibition centre, an opera house, an Olympic village, a playground, a golf course and artisan centers for Egyptian handicrafts. The governor said such multi-purpose projects serve the community as well as investors.

Ghaiati also said that agriculture plays an important role in North Sinai's development plan, saying that it is the basis for a stable community, providing the necessary raw materials for several production activities.

New projects approved

THE COOPERATIVE Council for Local Development, headed by Ibrahim Fawzi, approved the establishment of a new industrial project for manufacturing gas cylinders of various sizes. The project will be situated in the 2nd industrial zone of Belbeis.

Fawzi explained that investment in the project has reached LE12.8mn, with a capital reaching LE7mn. The project is expected to provide 300 job opportunities.

Fawzi added that another agreement has been passed to set up a project for the manufacture of cartons, having a capital of LE400mn and creating 45 job opportunities. Likewise, a project to establish a publishing house in 6 October City has been approved, with a capital of LE20mn, and investment of LE21mn and providing 40 job opportunities.

A project for manufacturing fertilisers will be set up with a capital of LE4mn on an area of 46,520 sq m in Beheira. Also approved was a project for manufacturing standard and galvanized conduit, occupying 20,000 sq m, with a capital of LE8mn and an investment of LE14mn. The project will be located in the industrial zone of Belbeis.

Major companies at Al-Ahram exhibition

THE 5TH Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition, to be held from 27 February until 2 March, will have major companies taking part as sponsors. Among these are the National Bank of Egypt, Banque Misr, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, ETS and Blue Max Computer.

Also new at the 5th Al-Ahram Computer Exhibition is the participation of the largest German exhibitors in computers and telecommunication, SYSTEMS 97 in Munich and CEBIT 97 in Hannover. Their appearance at the exhibition is considered an important addition for the exchange of expertise and ideas.

The 5th Al-Ahram and Information Technology Exhibition will take place simultaneously with the 5th Conference on Artificial Intelligence, organised by Helwan University and the American University in Cairo.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Sanctimonious solutions

As tensions mount between the SPLA and Sudan's Islamist government troops, another of Africa's troubled countries seems set to author one more bloodied page in the continent's tortured annals of history. Again, the cause is the right of representation and self-determination. And again, as in central Africa, ethnic animosity and economic hardship play an integral role in setting the tone for the present conflict while, more likely than not, shaping the form, or lack thereof, of future solutions.

These solutions, at least for President Al-Bashir, would be maintaining the status quo — a situation that has left both northern and southern Sudanese disgruntled and impoverished. For the SPLA's John Garang, as well as other key opposition leaders like Sadig Al-Mahdi and Othman Al-Mirghani, change would best be realised through toppling this regime. But what then? Although Al-Mirghani asserts that a new Sudanese regime would lead a united Sudan, Garang, while in favour of this unity, can give no guarantees. He will, he says, embrace any decision reached by his people. This, in short, spells secession — most likely initiated by an overwhelming majority of southern Sudan's parliament, the National Legislative Council, and backed by countries supporting the Sudanese southern opposition.

Such a turn of events, as asserted by President Mubarak, as well as the other leaders of the Arab world, would be inconsistent with, and disastrous to, the inalienable right of every country to independently resolve its internal disputes. Moreover, foreign intervention would likely do little more than destabilise or completely destroy the existing status quo, however tenuous it may be, while simultaneously initiating a chain of events that could spread to neighbouring countries.

The solutions then are clearly not found in another armed rebellion, but in paving the way and opening channels for dialogue as a means of best serving the interests of a united Sudanese people, especially given that they have for too long paid the price of a war that remands the dream of prosperity and stability to the status of wishful thinking.

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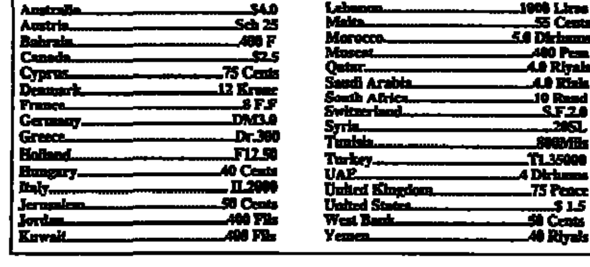
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		Yemen	40 Riyals





Cult of the irrational

Reports of devil worship among the young have shocked the public. **Ibrahim Nafie** examines the phenomena that lie behind the disturbing headlines

The shocking news that a number of young Egyptians had been detained on charges of practicing devil worship greeted the nation as it woke last week to the morning newspapers. And while it is true that the numbers of people involved are not large, alarm bells nonetheless sounded throughout Egyptian society that such bizarre practices should have taken root among mainly affluent young people, and found such seemingly fertile soil among the lives of the privileged.

Nor is it surprising that the news should have provoked such a strong response. The world is, after all, seeing an increase in the number of groups engaged in marginal cults whose practices run counter to the teachings of orthodox religions and the moral principles embodied in national codes of law.

Certainly, Satanism and its offshoots have seen a revival in the West in recent years, where cult followers have adopted an increasing high profile and groups such as Anton Levy's Church of Satan can command a great deal of publicity. In the public's mind they have come to be associated with raucous music, bizarre costumes, disrespect for the symbols of law and outrageous acts of deliberate sacrilege. Equally disconcerting have been reports of drug abuse and libertine sexual practices associated with cult rituals.

Satanism appears to be a perversion of the fundamental tenets of the revealed religions whose precepts the Satanists consistently invert. Typically, rituals are built around symbols of violence and black magic, and cult members are exhorted to act in precisely those ways that most contradict the society's accepted standards of behaviour.

How, one might well ask, have such ideas come to be imported in a traditionally conservative society such as that prevailing in Egypt? Clearly, on the back of the communications revolution a large number of ideas opposed to traditional standards are now readily available and can be easily accessed on global networks such as the Internet. The young are particularly susceptible to such influences which can be reinforced by exposure to extreme western groups when traveling abroad. This is particularly true, according to a study Dr. Elizabeth Barrett published in the US, for teenagers from broken homes who are, the report concluded, the most likely group to be attracted to such cults.

It is also true that we are morally obliged to act so as to protect the young from the invidious and pernicious influences to which they are prey, which requires that we identify those who are most at risk.

If the revelations that formed such a staple of last week's newspaper reports are anything to go by the phenomenon of devil worship is particularly prevalent among the sons and daughters of the affluent, upper middle classes, with those falling in the age group between 15 and 25 being most vulnerable. Those most attracted, then, to such cult activities are not drawn from the classes that have borne the brunt of the hardships that have characterised recent economic crises. They have no experience of the deprivation that accompanies unemployment and which many analysts have suggested constituted one of the major forces that drove members of the poorer classes into the arms of extreme Islamist groups. This being the case, we can ignore the presence of any economic dimension in the attraction to such cults, leaving us to concentrate on psychological and social factors. And it is in such factors that the most plausible explanation for the phenomena that exploded so shockingly in last week's headlines seems to lie.

Since the seventies Egyptian society has witnessed a number of important developments, changes that have enshrined work, and the acquisition of material goods, as among the most coveted of goals, often at the expense of other, more spiritual values.

Among the casualties of this new materialism have been the instilling of proper standards within the family. As the pressure on families to achieve — which has basically come to mean acquire — grew, so the emphasis placed on the proper upbringing and education of children diminished. The traditional values that for generations had been the corner stone of Egyptian family life were gradually eroded. As a result man's relations with God, and with his fellowmen, were neglected. In the search for ever greater incomes a great many heads of households were tempted by the high salaries offered by employers abroad and children were often abandoned to the care of nannies, or else mothers were left alone to take sole responsibility for the upbringing of the family's children.

It is easy to see how in such disrupted families children become disorientated. And in the absence of guidance, discipline and good counsel, they can become easy victims of malicious, alien ideas. And the sources of such ideas are plentiful. The Internet is but one channel among many. Satellite television and other electronically broadcast media are also potentially dangerous. Nor should we underestimate the role played by the archenemy of Egypt and of the Arab and Muslim world, the state that has recently smuggled large quantities of drugs into Egypt with the intention of damaging the minds of the young, in subverting traditional values.

The frustration experienced by young Egyptians from the higher social classes that has led them towards Satanism is a result of the specificity of their privileged situation, which separates them from the masses and buys them the luxury to seek elsewhere for alternative modes of life, styles of dress, and patterns of behaviour, more often than not opposed to tradition. But in the end it is the channels of socialisation in our own society that must be blamed for the deterioration and depletion of our cultural values.

In addition to the responsibility family life must bear for the deviation of our youth, schools, the media and political parties must count among the blameworthy. Religious leaders have neglected their duty to provide guidance for the young and instil them with spiritual values and have consistently failed to address them in a language that is at once comprehensible and appealing.

A comprehensive effort, then, is needed, to which families, schools, the media, political parties and religious leaders must all contribute. For even now it is difficult to believe that our youth who, in the past, addressed enormous challenges in both war and peace, is irretrievably lost in such weird and bizarre rituals as those of practised by the cult of Satan.

Labour's responsibility

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that Israel's opposition Labour Party must assume much of the responsibility for the future of the peace process

Despite the extended prerogatives he now enjoys thanks to Israel's new election law which, by providing for the direct election of the prime minister independently from the party he represents, immunises him against the obligation to resign in case parliament defeats the ruling coalition, Binyamin Netanyahu seems to have lost his grip on the situation. This is due not only to his implication in recently disclosed scandals such as the so-called *Bar-Ongate* tradeoff, in which Netanyahu appointed a shady figure, Roni Bar-On, to the post of attorney general in exchange for the ten Knesset members of the religious Shas Party voting in favour of the recent Hebron agreement.

Indeed, since he signed the Hebron agreement with the Palestinian Authority, Netanyahu no longer draws his majority in the Knesset from the support of the parties which constitute the right-wing coalition government he leads, but from Israel's opposition parties, notably the Labour Party. One Likud minister, Benny Begin, Menachem Begin's son, went as far as to resign in protest against the agreement. With Netanyahu's position dependent on Labour, it has acquired considerable leverage over determining the course of the peace process. This raises the question of how Labour is likely to use its new authority: as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis Likud, or to push for a new government coalition in which Labour would replace the opponents of the Hebron agreement in the present coalition government.

As the last, and most complicated, stage of the negotiations with the Palestinians draws closer, Labour seems to prefer striking a deal with Netanyahu than emphasising their points of difference with his right-wing policies. The Labour Party is less interested than before in projecting to its Arab interlocutors its commitment to Peres' slogan that it is worth taking certain security risks for the sake of peace. Labour has often been accused of applying double standards. The accusation was proved true by the policies followed by Peres after Rabin's assassination; it could well prove true once again.

In this connection, it is worth questioning why the Peres government ordered the Mossad to liquidate the leader of the military wing of Hamas, Yehya Ayash, at a time when Rabin's assassination had improved the chances for a breakthrough in the peace process. Of course, the order can be justified in terms of the need to eradicate terrorism. However, the decision to eliminate activists responsible for 'terrorist' acts is a political, not a technical one. To avenge Ayash's assassination, Hamas carried out a series of suicide bombings inside Israel. This brought the entire peace process to a halt. Clinton tried to reactivate it by calling for an international summit, which was held in Sharm-El-Sheikh and attended by Peres and most Arab leaders.

Considering that it had received a mandate from the summiteers to play a more active role in combating terrorism, the Peres government decided to extend its strikes, which had hitherto been focused primarily on Hamas, to Hizbullah in Lebanon. With the Qana massacre, Peres, who wanted to be identified with a policy which placed peace above security, found himself, on the eve of the Israeli elections, implementing Netanyahu's policy of placing security before peace. The Israeli electorate preferred voting for the more consistent representative of this policy. Peres, albeit unintentionally, paved the way for Netanyahu's access to power.

A similar process appears to be unfolding again. Although Peres and his party could have struck a better bargain for the support they gave Likud on the Hebron agreement, they decided to back Netanyahu unconditionally, presumably on the grounds that getting him to sign any agreement was worth supporting him against the rebellion in his own ranks. Once again, at a key moment in the negotiation process, Peres helped Netanyahu consolidate his position.

Actually, there is no reason why Labour must capitulate to the Israeli right. On the contrary, deeply divergent viewpoints over how to ensure the future of the Jewish state are inbuilt in Israeli politics, even though the contending parties operate within the ideological framework of Zionism. Because Israel is an implanted body in the region, there will always be those who argue that the Arabs in general, and the Palestinians in particular, will never accept it in their midst. That is the Netanyahu view. 'Peace', according to this school of thought, can only be achieved through military power and superiority.

The opposite viewpoint is that with the shrinking of the planet and the acceleration of history thanks to the technological revolution, there is no guarantee that military deterrence alone is sufficient to ensure survival. Economic incentives must be added. It is the essence of Peres's proposal for a Middle East market.

As neither of these two viewpoints is more valid than the other, both will continue to exist. Yet Peres has been less than decisive in applying his line. The same can be said of Netanyahu, who has been just as irresolute when it came to applying his, notably when he finally decided to sign the Hebron agreement. However, by making peace his system of reference, Peres has made himself answerable and accountable, which is not the case with Netanyahu.

It is because Labour attributes itself to the case of peace that its erratic policies are more readily exposed as untrustworthy and treacherous. This can explain why many Arab politicians still argue that no discernable distinctions can be made between the two parties. But a distinction should be made and Israel's Labour Party should be held responsible for systematically adopting policies running counter to its promises, especially on the eve of the most critical stage of the negotiations and at a time when Likud and Labour are looking for common ground, as attested by the so-called Beilin-Eitan document which was formally endorsed this week by both parties and to which I will devote my column next week.

Just one bite

By Naguib Mahfouz

My favourite food during Ramadan is undoubtedly fava beans. From childhood, food was always a problem with me, and *fuul* was always my favourite dish. To this day my dinner consists of *fuul*. During Ramadan, it was served up in numerous different ways, and at *iftar* I had eyes only for that dish, to the extent that my father gave order that it should be served at the end of the meal, thus obliging me to eat some of the other dishes to start with, but I always took care to leave room for the *fuul*, and kept an eye on it all the while. Of course, fava beans were not restricted to the holy month, but I always found them very special in Ramadan.

I also liked the Ramadan sweets, such as *qatayef*, *baklava* and *basboussa*. Most of all, I loved *kunafa* and its traditional ceremony. We used to make it at home, but unfortunately, ever since I contracted diabetes in 1960, I have never touched sweets or pastries, although I love them dearly. My taste is not restricted to Oriental sweets: I like cakes and tarts, too, but I never have them, not even on special occasions such as family birthdays. I am always pressed to have "just one bite", but I follow the doctors' orders to the letter.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — The trouble with Sudan

Al-Ahram: "It is not difficult to comprehend the difficulties Sudan is presently facing. I had hoped that Egypt would extend a helping hand, but the actions of the Bashir-Turabi government make this impossible. Whoever asks for help from others must begin by helping himself and show signs of being a good neighbour. It is no secret that Egypt's interests in Sudan are many — a great number of which have been nationalised. And, there has not been a single positive step by Khartoum to return things to their natural order."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 24 January)

Al-Ahali: "Bashir's allegations that the civil war is an external conspiracy is a thinly-veiled attempt to call in regional forces to save him from collapsing. Since it is difficult to hazard a guess as to how this war will end, it is in Sudan's best interests that this regime should go before it is forced to. Egyptian political forces which support it should warn this regime that it cannot go on and must change or be changed!"
(Amina El-Naqash, 22 January)

Al-Akhbar: "The trouble with the ruling Sudanese regime is that it wants more than what it is worth! It wants to dominate its neighbours without being able to. It has made a fatal mistake in imagining that it can dominate the region by harbouring terrorists for use in assassination plots. Instead of building up the country, the regime has directed its energies towards building training camps for terrorists and preparing them for acts of murder and sabotage."
(Said Sonbol, 23 January)

Al-Wafd: "One cannot help being amazed at Turabi's logic in wanting to punish Egypt for its position. Egypt is beyond punishment by any person even if he has the tools. What did Turabi want the Egyptian position to be? Did he want it to shoulder the price of the ongoing wars and wage a guerrilla war on behalf of Sudan against its neighbours? Yes, Egypt believes in the unity of Sudan, but this can only be achieved through reason and listening to the other side away from rash, impulsive actions. The unity of Sudan will not be achieved by military might because the roots of the problem will remain."
(George Fahim, 22 January)

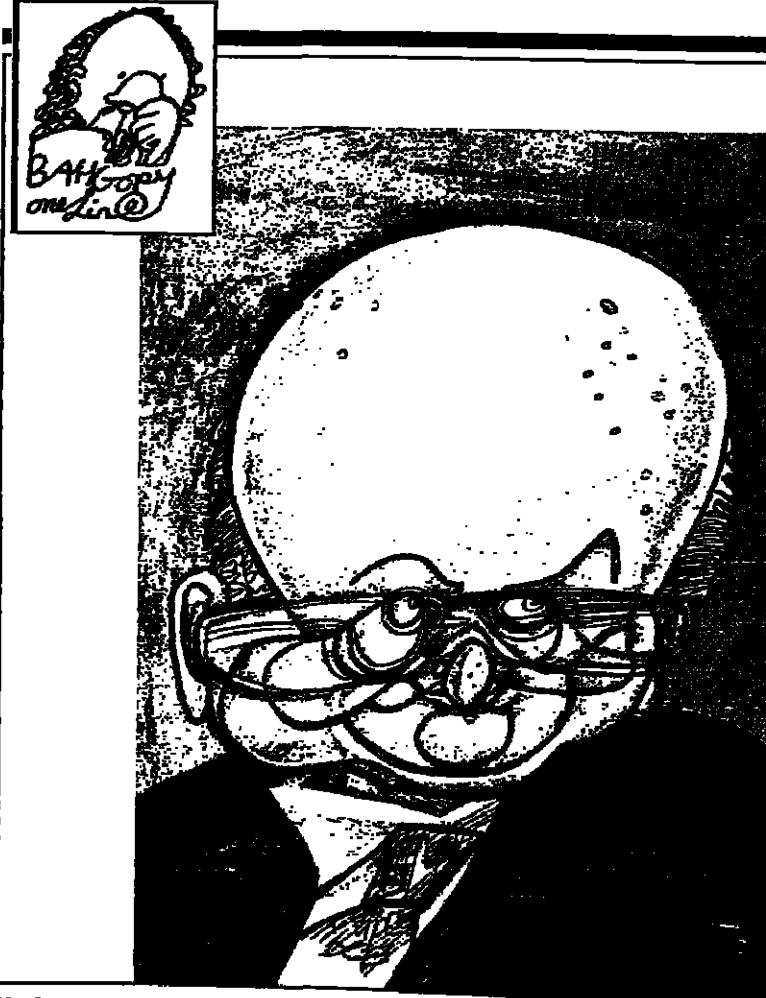
Al-Gomhuria: "Sudan has suffered long and hard under the Bashir-Turabi regime. Its economic and social conditions have deteriorated, its development projects have come to a halt and inflation has soared. These are the problems everyone must face to save the Sudanese economy from collapsing. And Egypt will continue to be Sudan's mainstay no matter which regime is in power."
(Editorial, 22 January)

Al-Shaab: "I must confess that I am unable to understand the current Egyptian policy towards the conspiracies that are being directed at Sudan and, indirectly, the sources of the Nile. It is impossible that the government does not realise these dangers. Can it be that US pressures and threats are causing the present confusion so that one day we accept reconciliation with the ruling regime and the next we are calling for the overthrow of that same regime? Whatever the reasons, we should extend a helping hand to the present ruling regime and lay aside all differences with it for the moment."
(Adel Hussein, 24 January)

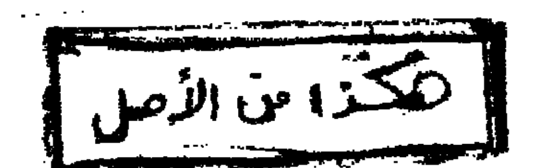
Rose El-Youssef: "Will Egypt's problems with Sudan be resolved if the opposition triumphs and puts an end to the Turabi regime? I do not think so. The opportunity to end Egyptian problems with Khartoum lies in the stability of political, security and economic conditions in Sudan. Every time there is a clash between the government and the opposition, a problem with Egypt arises. This is Egypt's fate with Sudan. Therefore, treating Sudanese affairs with great caution is a very wise Egyptian policy."
(Mahmoud El-Tohami, 27 January)

Al-Ahram: "The solution is to prevent a civil war at any cost — going into it is easy but stopping it is quite difficult, even impossible. But who knows? The army may make a move and decide the whole matter. And the popular uprising advocated by the opposition may well succeed. Bashir may even wake up and open a new chapter in which the regime would be for the people and not for terrorist groups. The most important thing is that the Sudanese people should win Sudan and keep its unity."
(Ihsan Bakr, 26 January)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



National Police Day, celebrated last Saturday, provided an opportunity for senior officials to congratulate the police on their instrumental role in maintaining stability and security. Their success in this difficult task is reason enough, perhaps, for the smile playing on the lips of Minister of Interior Hassan El-Alfi. But the piercing look in his eyes, beneath questioning eyebrows, suggests that the minister's persistent vigilance will continue.



هكذا من الأصل

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Cult(ure) shock

Egyptians were shocked to learn the details concerning the young people who banded together, not for political or terrorist purposes, but supposedly to worship the devil. The details released, however, only gave a glimpse of what was taking place, a glimpse allowed by the security apparatus so as not to cause undue alarm or social unrest. Not one of those who announced their shock and revulsion in the Shura Council, parliament, or the press, stopped to consider that this phenomenon was the sign of a real crisis facing a new generation of young Egyptians. This crisis threatens to block most of the usual legitimate activities of young people in a democratic society, leaving them only their private lessons, or football and video films to occupy their energy and their minds.

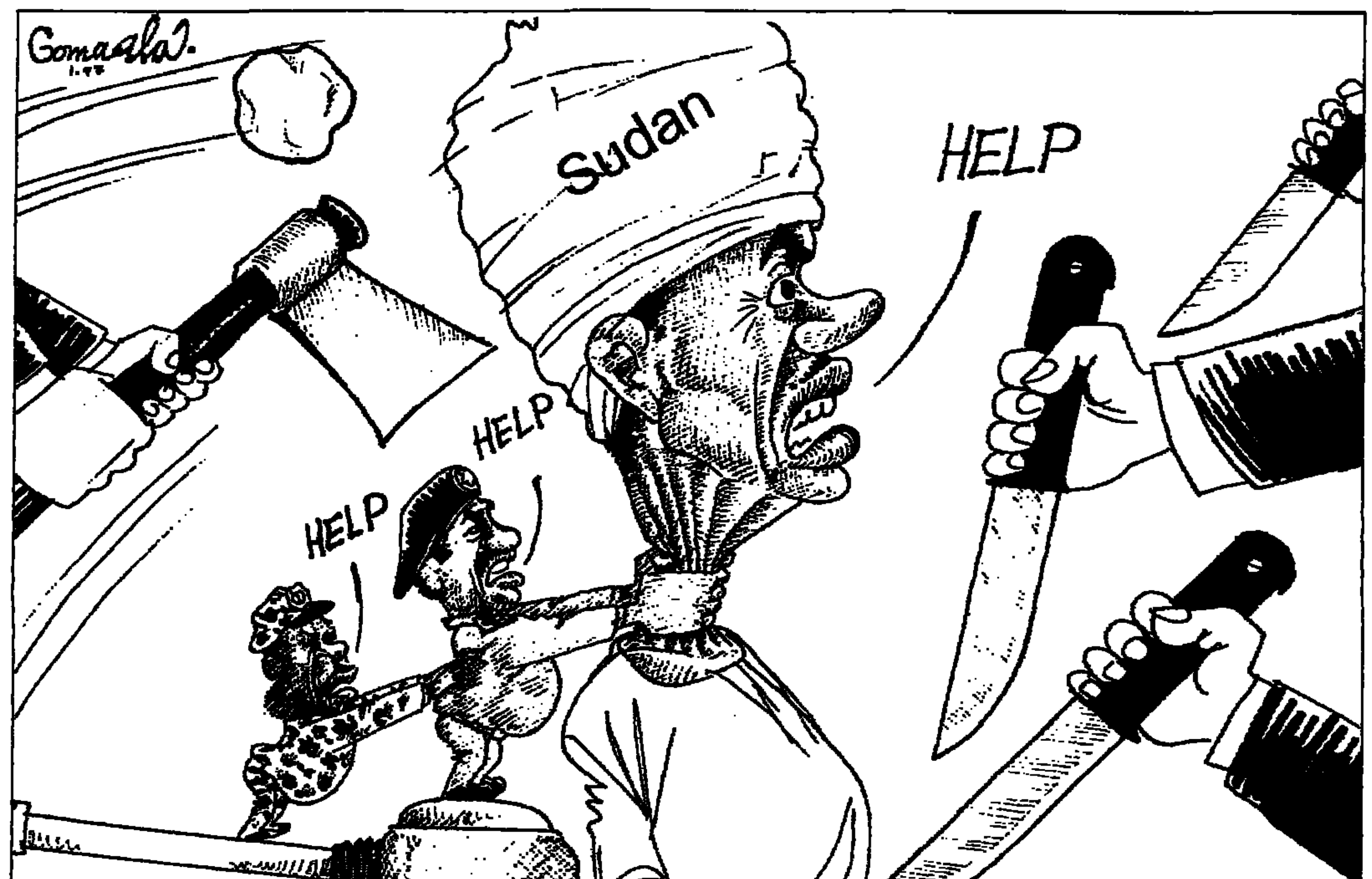
Instead of examining ourselves, instead of encouraging this generation, with every material benefit necessary for emotional and mental development, to participate fully in building the society in which we live and to bear the responsibility for its future, we have managed to excel only in demanding the heaviest penalties for those who dared to scratch the gleaming shell of a society which considers itself morally perfect. We have looked away from the corruption and hypocrisy lurking in the background, ignored the stifling restrictions against thought and creativity, the noose tightening around youth groups and activities, and religion enclosed in a liturgy that does not adapt to the challenges and evolution of a new era and a new world.

Such phenomena as devil worshipping and cults have occurred in many other societies. Religion in modern, materialistic societies have had to confront all kinds of challenges and doubts. In Europe, America and Asia, numerous cults have surfaced that challenge religious belief and engage in bizarre rituals. The followers of the Japanese cult who planted poison gas in the Tokyo subway and the French and Swiss followers of the Sun Temple, whose carbonised bodies were discovered in a forest, as well as other cults in the United States, are merely variations on a single theme — a reflection of the flaws in religious faith and the psychological traumas people suffer in their daily lives.

Most of the young men and women arrested and accused of devil worship, if they were examined by psychiatrists and social workers, would be found to be suffering from psychological, social and family troubles. Many are primarily concerned with how this group infiltrated Egyptian society, as though this society were immune to global phenomena, as if we had not opened up to the global economy, technology and the media, and as if it had not permitted young people to study abroad and meet others. The Egyptian media have published stories about wild parties held by the elite, with the expected result that some — especially the most privileged and influential — have begun to imitate blindly all sorts of Westernised lifestyles, including the most lunatic and perverse.

We cannot call on the security forces and religious organisations for help — they cannot solve these young people's problems. Nor will threats of imprisonment or condemnations of apostasy — the latter suggested quite plainly by the Mufti — eliminate the phenomenon and cure the young. Calling this a Zionist conspiracy is both simplistic and stupid. This phenomenon is an integral part of opening up to other cultures and civilisations, of unregulated evolution toward new mores, conventions, innovations, traditions, thought and beliefs, some of which are positive and acceptable, whilst others are negative and must be resisted.

This resistance must take the form of enlightenment and teaching. It must also examine the reasons why young people are prone to such excesses, why they are so ready to wholeheartedly embrace the West's latest fetish. This crisis is that of a generation and of a society. It is useless to try and cure it by force — nor will self-flagellation do the trick.



Soapbox

Fully booked

The printing and publishing industry in Egypt is a major part of national production. According to the estimates of the Egyptian Publishers' Association, production in printing and publishing, whether of general books, school books, newspapers, magazines, notebooks or other commercial and industrial paper-related goods, exceeds Egypt's production of oil or its revenues from the Suez Canal or tourism. More than 85 per cent of this activity, however, remains under state control. No noteworthy efforts have been made to privatise or economically reform the publishing sector; nor is there even equality between private and public sectors in that field.

One of the main concerns of the Association and its board of directors is to have an effective role in protecting publishing rights and authors' copyrights. In this respect, the Egyptian Association works in close cooperation with the General Association of Arab Publishers. Thanks to their joint efforts, a number of violations have been detected. The perpetrators were boycotted and forbidden from participating in any of the book fairs organised in the Arab world.

The Associations have also been of pivotal importance in promoting professional cooperation between Arab publishers, on one hand, and their Egyptian and international counterparts, on the other, thus enabling both the development of a flourishing translation movement and the protection of copyrights.



Finally, Egyptian publishers have been very active in the production of textbooks. The Ministry of Education determines the curricula for the different stages of education, then requests tenders from various publishers, who bring together the most talented writers and illustrators in an effort to outbid their competitors. This has led to the improvement of the quality of books produced in Egypt, on one hand, and the rationalisation of the publishing industry, on the other.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the chairman of the Egyptian Publishers' Association.

Ibrahim El-Muallim

Handing over the keys

Redeployment or withdrawal? **Amin Hewedy** looks past the protocol and flag-waving at the Hebron issues

Before his departure from the military headquarters in Al-Khalil (Hebron) at 6.10am on 17 January (and later from the town itself), Major General Gaby Ovier, commander of the Israeli forces in the West Bank, made a brief statement to the press declaring that he had "successfully handed over the keys of the town to the Palestinians in accordance with the Hebron agreement". Obviously, there were no keys to hand over. The diplomatic statement was intended primarily to impress upon the world that the Israelis were leaving the town and voluntarily handing its administration over to the Palestinian Authority. While "receiving the keys" of Hebron from the general is an important step, not to be underestimated, it pales in comparison with the "treasure trove" itself: after all, any imitation key may do the job. The Israeli concept of keys and treasures is radically different from the lyrics of the old Arabic song according to which "the treasure has been stolen, yet I have safely kept the key..." The use of passkeys, a technology developed over the past sixty-odd years, was unknown at the time.

Applying the same logic, Israel has never, in any of its peace agreements (Camp David, and the 1979 treaty), mentioned its intention to "withdraw" ; instead, it chooses to "redeploy." In fact, Israel has been careful when "redeploying" to celebrate the event by much lowering and hoisting of flags, and the playing of various national anthems before an audience of notables. Withdrawal, of course, is not accompanied by such paraphernalia. It is an act intrinsically linked to the battlefield, like advancement and retreat, attack or defence by troops; it is not known to take place in the absence of intensive coercion and heavy enemy fire. Israel, however, does not admit that the major-general is withdrawing under pressure; instead, he is voluntarily pulling out of one territory to redeploy in another. Even when the Egyptian forces forced the Israeli army to withdraw from the Bar Lev line in October 1973, Israel claimed that it was redeploying its forces in preparation for counter-attack.

This reminds me of the dispute which raged between the Arab countries, Iran and the Gulf states during the fifties and sixties: the issue was whether the Gulf should be designated as the "Arab" or the "Persian" Gulf. The problem was resolved by a wise Arab, who suggested that the body of water be designated only as "the Gulf", without a further qualification of its identity. Iran, however, using the logic of the *fait accompli*, insisted on the Gulf's Persian identity. It occupied three islands in the Gulf, established missile bases there and along the Iranian coast, and strengthened its naval force in the Gulf. Iran backed up its actions with words; in politics, if the reaction is weak, the action, meeting no resistance, will accomplish its aim with consummate ease.

Israel, however, has not pulled out of Arab territory voluntarily. It is inconceivable that Israel — in view of its well-known expansionist tendencies and constant reluctance to determine its borders (defined by Ben Gurion as the furthest point which Israeli defence systems can reach), would willingly give up major cities and villages, thus forfeiting its dream of a greater Israel. Once at the helm and no longer anxious to curry favour with voters, Netanyahu became conscious of external and internal pressures and of his duty as a leader to take decisions which he himself does not dictate but which are forged by the policies and pressures of different interest groups.

The keys were handed over only after the Hebron agreement had been approved by the Knesset 87 to 17 (with one abstention), at the outcome of a twelve-hour debate. In other words, the Likud prime minister, brought into office — for the first time — by direct elections, is now drawing support from a Knesset in which the Likud has no majority to oppose the peace process. He may advance more boldly along the path of peace, as the influence of the hardliners in the religious coalition which threatens to bring down his government dwindles. The new situation weakens the possibility of a coalition government, which Netanyahu had been contemplating, and fosters the pursuit of peace — bearing in mind that coalition governments are usually least effective in situations where profound changes are required. The very existence of a majority outside the government which supports the peace process and dominates the legislative body is far more useful than a majority entangled in the labyrinths of government and called upon to address endless problems. The parties concerned should remain in contact with Peres and others who have adopted similar positions, even if in reality their policies are not what they appear to be, and even if Peres himself was originally responsible for planting mines in many places before he was shoved into the opposition in the recent elections.

Strangely enough, the full text of the Hebron agreement was not published, although this has been customary for other agreements in the past; nor was it disclosed to the members of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly (in reaction to which several members withdrew from the meeting dedicated to discussing the document). Having failed to obtain the full text of the Hebron agreement, I attempted to draw some insight from the fragments published intermittently by the press. The film showing Arafat's entry into Hebron transmitted by a satellite network, more expressive than any published account of the event, depicted the leader surrounded by jubilating crowds in Hebron. He delivered a speech to reassure the people and to increase their confidence in the future. The agreement is the outcome of an intensive exercise in muscle-flexing by the negotiating parties. Neither party can claim that it scored an absolute victory over the other. Defeats and compromises, as well as victories, abound on every side. At times one party, having lost on one or two points, won on three or four points in another issue. The agreement, which reflects the balance of forces, does not reflect a balance of interests. From the few details gleaned from various sources, it has become evident that fear dominates the Israelis and is reflected in the decisions taken. We can therefore conclude that intransigence and extremist positions reflect fear more than they do hardline religious stances, a fact which may be taken into consideration by the Palestinian party in forging its policies.

The 400 Jewish settlers in Hebron today are all newcomers to the city; they were not there before 1967. The Israeli government encouraged visitors to the patriarch's shrine to settle in Hebron and succeeded in persuading 15 of them at first. With persistent efforts on the part of the government and rabbis, the number of Jewish settlers reached its present level of 400. Each settler, according to the terms of the agreement, is to be guarded by five Israeli soldiers. One alternative was to allow the settlers to live freely, side by side with the 120,000 Palestinians of Hebron; another was to relocate them in another settlement, Kiryat Arba, in one of the suburbs of Hebron. The last alternative — the worst of all — has been chosen. According to the agreement, one fifth of the city is allocated to the settlers, and the city is divided into a western and an eastern sector. The tightly guarded Jewish sector is a virtual ghetto. Any Jewish settler would have second thoughts about moving outside it or mixing with the Palestinian townsfolk. Mixing with other communities, at any rate, is abhorrent to the Jews, ever afraid of losing their Jewish identity. "Being a minority in any part of the world", Herzel warned, "the Jews may easily become assimilated to other communities over time." He was opposed to the idea of "mixing" with other peoples, even in countries where the financial establishments and trade were dominated by Jews. He forbade marriage with non-Jews after observing the disappearance of wealthy Jewish families in Paris, assimilated into the European aristocracy, which was eager to form alliances by marriage with wealthy Jewish families.

The Israelis are still victims of this ghetto complex. The blueprints for their future settlements, roads and bridges are designed to give them tight control of communication, entrances and exits — to impose a complete siege on the Palestinians. Israel refuses to learn from the Rhodesian and South African experiences, where racist regimes sought to enslave the indigenous population. Israel's policies are reminiscent of the behaviour of General Patten in the second world war. After his troops had landed on the coast of Normandy, the Germans took advantage of the bad weather which hampered the superior air defences of the Allies, and launched a major attack intended to drive the Allied forces into the sea. As the Panzer troops closed in behind the lines of the American army, Patten was awakened from his sleep and told of the situation. He replied: "If they are behind us, then we are also behind them. Advance!", whereupon he went back to sleep.

Will the partition of the city help defuse explosive emotions? Will the partition prevent social relations from developing among the inhabitants of Hebron, whether in the form of everyday interaction, conflict or even intermarriage? Would peace not be better served by a return to the partition plan of 1947, which provided for the establishment of two states with two capitals, than by the current artificial division, expected to induce more violence and contention than peace and understanding?

Another topic widely discussed before the signing of the agreement is the question of arming the Israeli and the Palestinian police patrolling the city side by side. While the Israelis were to carry machine-guns, the Palestinians had to make do with pistols. This is far too ridiculous for words. Would it prove an insurmountable difficulty for Palestinians who had smuggled fire arms of all calibres into Hebron when it was under Israeli control, to do so under the Palestinian Authority? The absurdity is even greater since the policemen will not be on the beat until the Palestinian police return a number of rifles stolen from the Israeli forces, or possibly bought from Israeli servicemen. While Israel is insisting on reducing the number of weapons in the hands of the Palestinian police, it is expecting the same police to keep a firm grip on possible outbursts of Palestinian nationalists demonstrating their opposition to Israeli occupation. Israel is asking the Palestinians to delete two lines in their charter: this indicates that the conflict is not one of borders but of existence, as though removing one or two lines would alter the true motives of outbursts of violence, should they occur.

To dispel some fears, however, the following steps have been taken:

Arafat and Netanyahu asked Dennis Ross to prepare files "for the record", duly signed by him, in which the commitments pledged at the Erez crossing on 15 January 1997 would be defined. "For the record", Israel duly recognises Oslo and is committed to redeploying its troops during the first week of March;. negotiations of the remaining issues are to commence soon, prisoners are to be released in accordance with special arrangements and final status negotiations are to commence within two months. The Palestinians are committed to revising their charter, clamping down on terrorism, fostering cooperation and reform, and other such ambiguous tasks.

Secondly, UN forces are to take up their positions in Hebron.

At the signing of the Hebron protocol, Netanyahu was handed a letter from Warren Christopher assuring him of Washington's continued efforts to conclude and implement the agreement. The letter maintained that Arafat was urged to keep firm control on public order, internal security in the West Bank and Gaza; and that he was notified that the first stage of redeployment must take place soon, while the remaining three stages are to be completed over 12 months, no later than 1998. Lastly, Washington pledged its support of Israel's security demands and of its right to secure borders which it can defend, to be negotiated with its neighbours.

The US also sent a letter to Chairman Arafat, but nothing has been published as regards its content.

Thus, six months after Netanyahu's advent to power, an agreement on Hebron has been forged. It seems that Netanyahu's procrastination and his persistence in raising obstacles are a strategy to gain more time, thus giving Sharon, minister of in' structure and the environment, the opportunity to effect geographical and demographic changes on the ground. In other words, while the Israeli prime minister performs the secondary tasks "verbally", to gain time, Sharon is changing the realities on the ground, by altering the physical features of the territories under occupation.

Despite the shortcomings of the agreement and the absence of political will, Israel will withdraw from four-fifths of the city of Hebron. Israel has planned to convert the remaining fifth of the city into a ghetto to accommodate 400 Jewish settlers. The Palestinians may have received the keys — but the treasure is still not in their hands. It is lost in the clouds of dust raised by the speeding military vehicles which, in the words of an Israeli spokesman, are busy "redeploying" the Israeli troops — or which, according to the Palestinian inhabitants of Hebron, are "withdrawing" from the city.

The writer is former defence minister and head of General Intelligence.

Treading on abandoned ground

Is the World Bank empowered to combat corruption in borrowing states? In his second article on the subject, **Ibrahim Shihata** discusses the scope of, and limits to, the Bank's mandate in a shadowy domain

The World Bank's involvement in addressing corruption issues beyond the projects it finances has not been free from controversy. On one hand, it has been argued that the World Bank is not an institution governing the borrowing countries; its mandate as an international institution for the financing of reconstruction and development is defined by its Articles of Agreement. Subject to a weighted voting system and limited in its operations to the borrowing countries, the Bank's role as a world reformer beyond its defined purposes would inevitably imply the rich countries' rule over the poorer ones.

In any event, the Bank should only be concerned with the functions provided for in its Articles of Agreement, of which the main function is to help finance specific projects for productive purposes. It should, in particular, avoid involvement in a subject matter which has obvious domestic political connotations and could entangle the Bank in complex political considerations which it is explicitly prohibited from taking into account.

It should nonetheless be stated that, as the world's major development financing institution and the coordinator of foreign aid to many of its members, the Bank cannot realistically ignore issues which significantly influence the effective flow and appropriate use of external resources in its borrowing countries. It has already been able to deal with a large number of governance and institutional issues which have direct relevance to its development mandate, without entanglement in partisan domestic politics. Its concern with public sector management in borrowing countries has been an important part of its operational and research work through the years.

Any intervention by the Bank would, at any rate, take the form either of a financial agreement to which the country involved would be a contracting party, as a borrower or guarantor, or advice which must be related to the Bank's development mandate. In neither case can the Bank take a coercive stance or impose a particular direction on a borrowing member. It can only play a facilitating role, the effectiveness of which would depend largely on the borrower's full commitment and cooperation.

As a practical matter, on the other hand, the World Bank can hardly insulate itself from major issues of international development policy. Corruption has become just such an issue. Its prevalence in a given country increasingly influences the flow of public and at times private funds for investment in that country.

The Bank's lending programmes, and in particular its adjustment lending, take into account factors which determine the size and pace of such flows. From a legal viewpoint, what matters is that the Bank's involvement must always be consistent with its Articles of Agreement.

The Bank can take many actions to help the fight against corruption without violating these Articles. It can conduct research on the causes and effects of this worldwide phenomenon. It can provide assistance, by mutual agreement, in the areas of economic, civil service, legal and regulatory, judicial, and other institutional reforms, to enable its borrowing countries to curb corruption. It may take up the issue of the effect of corruption on development as a subject of discussion in the dialogue with its borrowing members.

And, if the level of corruption is high according to factual and objective analysis, and if the government is not taking serious measures to combat it, the Bank can take this into account as a factor in its strategy towards the country. The only legal barrier in this respect is that, in doing so, the Bank and its staff must be concerned only with economic causes and effects, and should refrain from intervening in the country's political affairs. While the task may be difficult in borderline cases, its limits have been prescribed in detail in legal opinions endorsed by the Bank's board.

According to one such legal opinion ("Governance Issues and their Relevance to the Bank's Work" issued in December 1990), the concept of governance in the sense of the overall management of a country's resources cannot be irrelevant to an international financial institution which at present not only finances projects but also is deeply involved in the process of economic reform carried out by its borrowing members.

Clearly, the concern here is not with governance in the broad sense of the exercise of state powers in all its aspects, but with the appropriate management of the public sector and the creation of an environment facilitating the functioning of the private sector. It is a concern for rules which are actually applied and institutions which ensure the appropriate application of these rules, to the extent that such rules and institutions are required for the economic development of the country and in particular for the sound management of its resources.

No doubt, the Bank has to address issues of corruption in this context with great caution, acting on the basis of established facts and only to the extent that the issues clearly affect the economic and social development of the country. It cannot, however, ignore such issues at a time when they have become a major concern, not only to the sources of international financial flows but also to business organisations and indeed to the governments and peoples of most of its member countries.

The writer is senior vice-president and general council of the World Bank.

Love's letter lost

Nehad Selaiha follows the adventures of a randy letter and a fake diamond at the National

With the first half of Ramadan behind us, the lights are beginning to go up again in some theatres. The National has led the way with a resumption of *Hikmat Hanim Almaz*, a lively musical comedy loosely based on the Romanian Ion Luca Caragiale's *The Lost Letter (O scrisoare pierduta*, 1884). The play, in a translation by Edwar Kharrat, had received its Egyptian premiere in 1956 in a production directed by Hamdi Ghayth at the same venue. For the current revival (which opened last December and ran for two weeks before it temporarily closed down on account of the quasi-mandatory one-week theatres' holiday at the beginning of Ramadan), Hoda Wasfi, the head of the National, chose a promising young director as part of her policy to renew the blood of this old, venerable establishment. Her decision, perhaps not unpredictably, incensed the old guard of veteran directors and provoked a lot of hostility regardless of the merits of the show. At the public meeting between the minister of culture and theatre people, held at the Balloon Theatre on the eve of Ramadan — a meeting which soon disintegrated into a slanging match and witnessed many an unfortunate incident, including two directors literally coming to blows — director Hamdi Ghayth launched a virulent tirade against Wasfi's policy in running the National, accusing her of having turned the theatre into a playground for 'kids'. He was clearly referring to Mohamed Omar, the director of the current production of *The Lost Letter*, who in his early thirties, hardly qualifies as a 'kid'. Either Ghayth, at over 70, is beginning to suffer a failure of memory, or goaded by a bitter resentment of the younger generation, has conveniently chosen to forget how he and his generation, in the sixties, were given leading positions in the theatre when they were, by his present criterion, still 'toddlers'; that is, in their late twenties.

The antagonism occasioned by Wasfi's choice of director was exacerbated by the stuffy, conventional attitude as to what it is 'proper' for the National to show. Comedy, and especially musical comedy, is traditionally tacitly regarded as unworthy of the National, unless, of course, it is Shakespeare's or Moliere's. Romanian drama is practically unknown in Egypt, and, for many, Caragiale, who is described in most world drama encyclopaedias as Romania's most important dramatist and the founder of its comic theatre, is a virtual nonentity. Critics, who after the controversial musical version of Ahmed Shawqi's verse comedy *Al-Sitt Huda*, ebulliently directed by Samir Al-Asfouri, had been expecting something solid and familiar, like *Hamlet* or *The Merchant of Venice* (two advertised projects that ran into obstacles and had to be postponed or temporarily abandoned), felt slightly betrayed and were baffled and confounded by the choice of play, forgetting it was in the National's repertoire; others found the musical adaptation by Mohamed Bahgat, a young poet who in Ghayth's book would figure as another 'kid', too rowdy, funny, and cynically hilarious to suit the dignity of the National. Wasfi was accused of going commercial, especially since she contracted TV star Sumayyah Al-Alfi, to play the leading, eponymous role of lady *Almaz*.

I had heard such negative, off-putting reports of the show that I nearly did not go to see it. When I did go, it was with cold feet, expecting the worst. Possibly this made me more tolerant about it than I might otherwise have been; but, on the whole, the evening passed pleasantly enough with occasional bouts of side-splitting laughter. The adaptation set the play in Egypt, during the monarchy, and came up with suitable equivalents for the names of the original characters and their social positions. Despite some alterations and additions it stuck closely to the basic plot of the original text and tried to preserve its sharp, satirical edge and witty dialogue. Osama Abbas, a brilliant and subtle comedian, undertook the part of Stepan Tipatescu who, during an election campaign discovers that a love letter he had written to his mistress Zôe Trahanache (competently and elegantly played by Sumayyah Al-Alfi), had fallen into the hands of his rival and political opponent Catavencu who threatens to publish it and cause a scandal (the lady is married to Tipatescu's best friend) unless the couple help him win the election. While the feverish efforts of the couple to recover the letter and bargain with Catavencu engage the centre of the plot and propel the action along with enough suspense to sustain the interest of the audience, the surface is embroidered with farcical incidents, satirical lyrics and hilarious political parody. At times, however, the embroidery grew so thick that it nearly obstructed our view of the central action. Indeed, with such comedians as Ahmed Aql in the role of Zôe's cuckolded husband, Sami Maghawri as the lovable villain Catavencu, Ahdi Sadiq as Tipatescu's bungling and boastful right-hand man, not to mention the excellent contingent of less famous comedians — Fathi Sa'd, Ibrahim Gamal, Mohamed Khalil, Ayman Abdel-Rahman, among others — who doubled in many of the minor parts, and the irrepressible Rida Idris as the town drunk who finally finds the letter, the play seemed to have such an overabundance of comic talent that at moments it threatened to burst at the seams. In the electioneering episode, for instance, in Act Two, the actors got into such a heated competition for laughs that the scene lost all form and rhythm and slid into chaos; as they frenziedly fought to drown out and upstage one another, adlibbing *ad infinitum*, the absence of a firm directorial hand was regrettably only too obvious.

But the thing that truly marred the production was the decor. Salah Hafez's sets lacked not only flair and imagination, but good taste as well. They bulked large and sported the weirdest array of colours imaginable without having any dramatic significance. Na'ima Agami's elegant period costumes could not hope to make an impression in such a vulgar visual context and looked completely out of place. I kept trying to convince myself that it was all intentional — that the lurid garishness was meant as a sign of the intrinsic vulgarity and moral corruption of the *haut monde* the play portrays — but it was no use. Whenever the lights dimmed on-stage, except for a few spot lights on the actors, I experienced immense relief. Unfortunately, this did not happen very often. With different sets and more discipline where the actors are concerned, *Hikmat Hanim Almaz* could prove a genuine diamond — even though its heroine is a fake.

The Lost Letter — but would it have been easier to find with a firmer directorial hand?

Music

Far beyond tears

David Blake cultivates a taste for high spirits

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Ramadaniat 1; Piano soloist Olga Kouznetsova; Conductor Youssef El-Sisi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 18 Jan

Siegfried journeyed to the Rhine. Youssef El-Sisi later water-skied us to Bohemia and the Moldau. Czech music is an authentic jewel — it shines and flows like the great rivers of Middle Europe through all key moods.

This concert ended with river water. It opened with another kind of liquid — tears: Tchaikovsky's most lovely orchestral fantasy on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. El-Sisi had another transfigured night. *Romeo* is his kind of music: broad, deep toned and dramatic. Maybe this setting of Romeo is the best of all, though film, ballet and video have had a go at it. It is the closest to Shakespeare, even without the words. Like Verdi, the immense Russian adored the Bard of Stratford. Their view of him was salutary.

This piece for very large orchestra opens positively Mahlerian in its drooping fifths and up-swept arches of tone. The deep harp arpeggios were Dantesque, like warnings on human frailties. El-Sisi revelled. He encouraged the orchestra to accentuate what constantly appears in the music — its harking back to a formal, primitive, almost Byzantine grandeur collapsing under the weight of what the race was to become — modern. Seen from 1997, the layers of cruel irony with maestro and orchestra must deal are a heavy load. It should be of interest to musical Cairo, too few of whom were present, that this exalted view was reached and sustained. Loud, it was storm-ridden with great inky blotches of noise, subsiding to slivery and hushed pianissimi.

Orchestra and conductor surpassed even their recent showing of Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony. *Romeo* is all of a piece — a great shining drama of events with the two lovers borne helpless through it savage-sweet to a funeral dirge far beyond tears. It constitutes a solemn shrug of acceptance of a rich and savage world.

Hard task to follow the masterful design and weight of Tchaikovsky with a piano piece poised in the middle of a large Tchaikovskian orchestra. It says much for Mona Ghoneim that her scale and ability were a triumph. The *Rondo for Piano* was a fling in the grand manner; it was forceful, intelligent, expertly composed and stood firmly on its own feet. Nothing pedagogic or assertive about it. No didactic rhetoric but feelings, real ones, using a highly complex medium which swept the piece to complete success.

Olga Kouznetsova, the pianist, often denied opportunities to display her strength, was brave and powerful, giving an athletic gloss to the music and sending it high, where it belongs. Her technique allowed her to cope with its difficulties and the hair-raising speeds set by El-Sisi. What other things, one wonders, lie in Mona Ghoneim's cupboard?

The concert then went into Smetana for its second half, *The Bright Lights of Bohemia*. Unique music, it has presence, power and rhythm. Other music has these qualities in even greater quantity, but no European music ever mixed them with legend and such special colour. And it is the colours that immediately identify Smetana's from all other music. The product of a riverine people in constantly changing surroundings, it has verbal shadings but hardly ever a shadow. Never nocturnal, its elegiac feeling is not from the south. It stays northern.

Smetana knew Siegfried's *Journey to the Rhine* and El-Sisi knows it too. And it was the heroic adventurer he chose as his hero of the night, not Romeo. The Czech is go-getting, winner of the battle against all odds. Smetana's river landscapes, like Siegfried's, traces the movement of a river from source to outlet, the sea, ocean or mud-flat over which a battle rages. There is no ending to Valtava. It rages, roars, rips around headlands, over rocks and through gorges, into still pools, mirror-like, reflecting the positive image of its hero — Smetana himself and his country, both battling against the steely order of empire. It is powerful music, simple and direct like a Michelangelo torso.

At the climax, force meets force and it was thrilling, with not a stale note or conventional phrase. To achieve this revelation of Smetana's special qualities, the orchestra was transformed. The strings, which bore the brunt of the endless, capricious turns and colours of the water, were precisely etched. Beside this river trip three dances from the Smetana opera, *The Bartered Bride*, were played, giving Cairo a taste of what it misses by not having the entire *Bride* herself on stage at the opera — and possibly in Arabic, too. The singers are available, so too chorus, orchestra and conductors.

The music is flower-patterned, unlike the swathes of sound composed for the Valtuva. The ending is happy, the opera long in neither tooth nor listening time, but the music is Bohemian bliss. It is good to hear this Czech music in a Ramadaniyat of which this concert is the first of three. It was joyous, colourful and on an up-scale. The concert threw gave a taste of high spirits.



Mona Ghoneim

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Constantin Xenakis
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 355 1871. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 30 Jan.
Restrospective exhibition (1958-1996).

Jean-Pierre Ribiere (Photographs)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 8pm-11pm. Until 4 Feb.

Ramadaniat
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 8pm-10pm. Until 8 Feb.
Works by Omar El-Nagdi, along with Mustafa Kamal, Ibrahim Abdel-Malek, Ivon Ezzat and Fares Ahmed Fares.

Zakaria El-Zeini (Paintings, drawings & graphics)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-2.30pm & 7pm-11pm. Until 8 Feb.

Awad El-Shimi (Engravings)
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-2.30pm. Until 15 Feb.

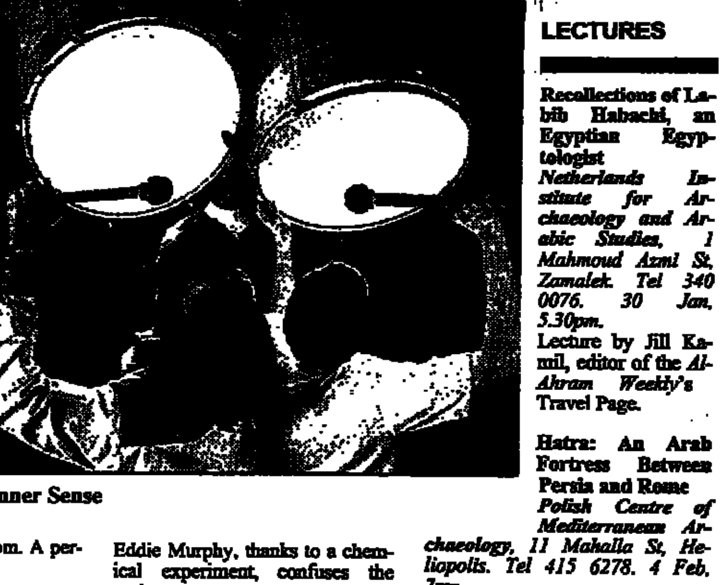
Group Show
Exhibition Hall, Cairo Meridien Hotel, Garden City. Tel 354 8382. Daily 10am-12am. Until 15 Feb.
Paintings, sculptures and engravings by 30 Egyptian artists.

Esmat Dawestashi (Paintings & Sculptures)
Gallery Hotel Sofitel, Hurghada. Tel 065/442 261. Daily until 16 Feb.

Sixth Cairo International Biennale
Akhenaten Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Cairo Opera Gallery, second floor, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0592. Daily 10am-8pm. Until 15 March.
The Centre of Arts hosts the wings of the USA, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Palestine, South Africa, Morocco and Tunisia among others.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.



Inner Sense

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Diva
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 30 Jan, 8pm.
Directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix (1980), starring Frederic Andrei, Wilhelmimia Fernandez, Richard Bohringer and Gerard Darmon.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Jentel (The Gentleman)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, Poussi and Elham Shahin play it for laughs.

Nazwa (The Fling)
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 8pm & 10pm.
The Egyptian version of *Fatal Attraction* with Ahmed Zaki, Youssra and Sherine Reda.

Dragon Heart
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm & 9pm.

Duston Checks In
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3pm & 9.30pm.

The Jungle Book
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

The Nutty Professor
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 10pm & midnight.
Eddie Murphy, thanks to a chemical experiment, confuses the scales.

Jingle All the Way
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Le Huitieme Jour
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

A Goofy Movie
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.45am, 1pm & 8.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 2pm & 9pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 10.45am, 1pm, 8.45pm & 10.30pm.

Mini Film Festival
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726.
Thur: **Dumb & Dumber**
Fri: **Don Juan**
Sat: **Mortal Combat**
Sun: **North**

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 30 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Gozour Troupe
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 30 Jan, 8.30pm.
Compositions by Fathi Salama entitled Rhythm and Percussions.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 1 Feb, 8pm.
Tunisian singer Lutfy Boushnaq performs, with conductor Ahmed El-Saedi.

Folklore from Palestine
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 3 Feb, 8.30pm.
Performed by the Sunflower Choral Troupe.

Inner Sense
30 Jan: Music Kiosk, Cairo Zoo, 12pm; El-Ghouri Palace for Heritage, opposite El-Azhar Mosque, 8pm.
31 Jan: El-Ghouri Palace, as above, 8pm; El-Hussein Square, El-Azhar, 10.30pm.
1 Feb: El-Anfoushi Cultural Palace, Alexandria, 8.30pm.
3 Feb: In front of Karnak Temple, 12pm; Luxor Cultural Palace, 9pm.
Momentous ragga, Rio samba, samba reggae and other demon Brazilian rhythms performed by the group from Manchester.

Daily programme at *Beit El-Harawi, behind El-Azhar Mosque, El-Hussein. Tel 340 7001:*
30 Jan, 8.30pm: Songs by Wagih Aziz
31 Jan, 8.30pm: The Conservatoire Youth String Quintet
1 Feb, 8.30pm: Music by the Farouq El-Bably Troupe
2 Feb 8.30pm: Fathi Salama's Sharqiat
3 Feb, 8.30pm: Poetry by Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Senna
4 Feb, 8.30pm: Songs by May and her musical troupe
5 Feb, 8.30pm: Songs by Fatma Sarhan

DANCE

Folkloric Dances
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 30 Jan, 8.30pm.
The Folkloric Troupe of the Wadi El-Gedid perform dances under the title Wedding at the Village.

THEATRE

El-Warsha Troupe
International Book Fair, exhibition grounds, Nasr City. 30 Jan, 8.30pm.
The troupe performs the Epic of Beni Hilal.

LECTURES

Recollections of Labib Habachi, an Egyptian Egyptologist
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 30 Jan, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Jill Kamil, editor of the *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s Travel Page.

Hatra: An Arab Fortress Between Persia and Rome
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 4 Feb, 7pm.
Lecture by Professor Michal Gawlikowski, director of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

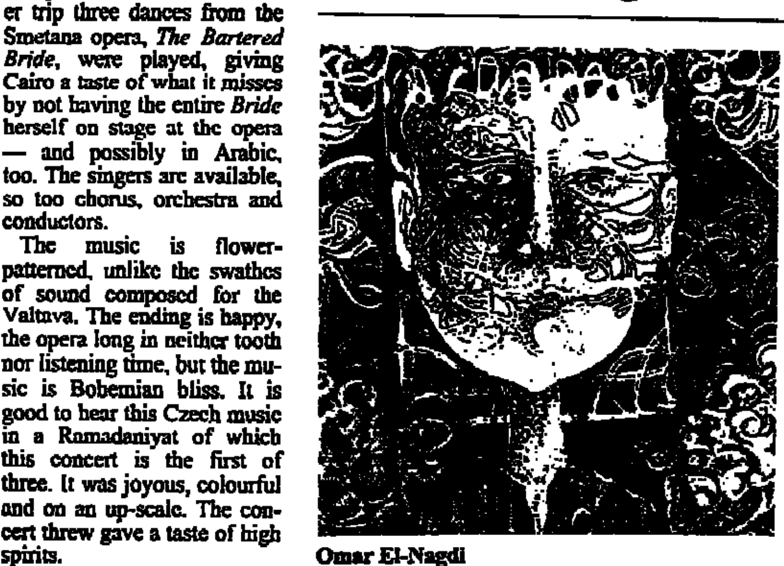
Global News In The 21st Century: Better Information or Neo-Imperialism?
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 30 Jan, 1pm.
Open forum by Bob Jobbins, international news director, BBC World Service, Simon Ingram, BBC Cairo bureau chief and Abdalla Schleiffer, director of the Adham Centre, AUC; moderator James Napoli, chairman of the department of Journalism and Mass Com, AUC.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Omar El-Nagdi

WORKS by **Louis Tewfiq**, Islamic style pottery by **Abdel-Aal Said**, paintings of Nubian scenes by **Ragab Ismail El-Gharbawy** and batiks depicting rural landscapes by **Ragab Abdel-Fattah** are included among the 150 works, by 45 artists, currently on show in the **6th of October City Cultural Palace**.

Mashrabiya Gallery hosts paintings and graphics by the late **Zakaria El-Zeini** while **Salama Gallery** hosts a group show under the title Ramadiyat. It includes multimedia works of Ramadan festivities by **Omar El-Nagdi**, watercolours of vernacular architecture by **Yvonne Ezzat** and paintings by **Ibrahim Abdel-Malak, Abdel-Khaleq Hussein** and **Faris Ahmed Faris**.

Paintings and ceramics by the late **Said El-Sadr**, one of the pioneers of modern Egyptian pottery and founder of the Ceramics Department of the Faculty of Applied Arts, are on show at **Extra Gallery**.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

A questioning aesthetic

What meanings accompany the peace process at its present stage? Does the possibility now exist for Palestinians to contemplate the leading of normal lives? Mahmoud Darwish, visiting Cairo on the ocassion of the 29th Cairo International Book Fair, finds the situation at once simpler, and far more complex, than is generally allowed

photo: Randa Shaath

I do not know, I do not know exactly, what our newly acquired proximity to the place of the name* will mean. Night and day, exile and homeland, poetry and prose — such seemingly clear dualities in reality possess confused borders, borders defined by an ambiguity that is simultaneously transparent and opaque.

Such an ambiguity, though, is not without virtue, and may, here and now, make possible an intimate critique of the clarity of exile before the question of whether this moment of transition represents a rupture between exodus and return can be posed.

The individual, within each of us, will need daily training to gradually rid him or herself of the heavy shadows of a meaning as these shadows depart an old time to enter a new one. We will also have to be trained to rid ourselves of comparisons that can be of very little use in our confused daily life. The dualities which inhabit us are not that definite to allow one thing to be defined by its opposite: to be here does not mean I am no longer there, not being there does not mean that I am here.

The individual within each of us will also need to be assured that he has regained all his senses and that those senses are functioning without mediation.

The collective, through each individual, needs, simultaneously, to rearrange its newly acquired anarchy and seclusion. And we will also need a degree of specialisation to distinguish the general from the specific.

And all this is needed to test our readiness to engage in the struggle to lead a normal life. In other words, one wonders whether the time has finally come for us to ask ourselves if we can be cured of ready-made images of ourselves, cured from the wounds of a self long alienated from itself?

Will we be able to descend safely from the skies of the myth to whatever little land — reality land— is available for names and identity? Will we be able to pursue an epic departure, a poetic conquista, when we know, from the outset, that the fate of its heroes is already decided, when we know that Helen was returned, on crutches, to her husband, before we were able to begin the writing of the first song?

Here is the fig tree by the house, enjoy its shadow: this is the simple song to be written by those returning to the house. But those who never left, who neither went nor returned, have a different song, a different nostalgia, a yearning for the continuation of their history inside the language, and the survival of language inside history.

Whether those groups once gone and now returning are big or small in number, whether they return to laugh or weep, is not the point. For the mere physical act of crossing over from exile to homeland, across this one metre of earth, is perhaps sufficient to transform the body into a spirit of joyous illumination. This act, however, is not yet reason enough, as anyone can tell, for us to celebrate our independence. For there exists a difference between the expression of freedom and freedom itself.

Questions clamber one over the other:

Can one be natural in an unnatural reality?

Nothing, after all, can appear natural during a birth in which beginnings and finales constantly interchange. And while it may be true that war has ended, this does not mean that peace has begun. It is not one of the noble attributes of peace that a military siege be imposed on a society that chose peace as an answer to its national and existentialist question, after that society had managed to rescue its identity from the double threat of disintegration within the "other" or else total rejection of that "other".

The victim inside us, fed up with its status as victim and with the need for heroism knows that it cannot progress in its debate with either the self or the "other" without depending on history, regardless of the fact that it is a victim of that history.

This urgent need to scrutinise one's identity, to search for an identity, is not a matter of narcissism, not a desire to remain within the shell, or an exercise in self-infatuation. Rather it is a strategy of self-defence before policies of negation and abrogation. It is a step on the long road of national struggle towards achieving an identity that can have a normal life, an identity that can afford us the opportunity to create an aesthetic capable of questioning our own identity if need be. Such questioning represents the highest degree of both freedom and belonging. Only when culture can question itself and activate those deferred questions bearing on society's taboos can we be free. Only when the homeland itself can be subjected to irony will we be free, but first we need to liberate both the homeland and irony from the state of siege.

But from one siege to the other our thoughts lose the freedom to roam or puncture the stereotype; they remain imprisoned by questions of survival, earning a living, fighting for the bare minimum be it a piece of bread, a shelter, a flag, a national anthem, a police force. Thus the question of searching for the normal and the natural becomes a search for a new miracle, a question raised before a group whose members have never been able to ponder their own individualities.

One of the ironies marking this transitional phase in our lives is that the proliferation of procedural terms concerning the details of the "peace process" — accompanied by a commensurate deterioration in the posing of pertinent questions, whether they pertain to basic human needs or existential matters — deepens our sense of occupation as our liberated land is encased in ever narrower cages. These are not the wounds of peace, as some would like to think, but evidence of how the peace process, as defined so far by the Israelis, lacks the essence of peace which must include — at the very least — a clear indication of the route to independence and the degrees of freedom therein. It is evidence of the fact that the first step — when the occupation moved out of bedrooms to living rooms — remains exactly where it was, and is insufficient to sustain the hopes that accompanied it. Hence it is not yet time to apologise for writings that did not transcend the context of their historical conditions to ponder metaphysical questions, or to apologise for writings unwilling to suspend the urge to catch up with modernism until the objective conditions of society provided a more opportune context.

Nor has the time come to incite those small dreams to persecute the larger dream for preventing them from pinning their shirts to the mast and setting sail, for the sea is shallow, and sailors dream only of growing parsley in small plots. But the sea has never been that shallow, and bigger dreams act only to let the smaller dreams flow within that self deprived of peace with itself so long as it is deprived of peace with the "other".

And this has not happened for reasons less intricate than the complexities of psychoanalysis or of cultural questioning as to how distant or close we are to a present that disappears the moment it is identified. Rather it has not happened because peace is not yet in hand, because our country is still occupied despite the presence of liberated holes that no more constitute a forest than would the absence of a single tree. Yet it is in these liberated holes that reality, as it is, is to be replaced by reality as it should be; in these liberated holes that the reconciliation with history is to be applauded as it hails from afar; it is here where we must train ourselves to await the miracle that will emerge from within a secluded self waiting at the crossing, and here that what is hell on the ground must be promoted to the status of paradise in language.

And if we do not succeed in effecting this miracle; if we do not succeed in achieving self-reliance and economic growth within these little holes separated from each other, and from the ocean, from the earth beneath and the sky above, the Israeli partner can then admonish us: you have only yourselves to blame for not being worthy of independence, you have only yourselves to blame.

And of course we too can blame ourselves. Why not? For it is our duty to master the arts of criticism and self-criticism, to differ with each other on all aspects of life, on the nature of the administration and ministerial powers, on metaphor, on the *hijab*, on rhyme, on the limits to obedience and the quality of radio programmes. But none of this means that we will lose the ability to distinguish between independence and occupation. And this is where the Palestinian Authority, which draws its national legitimacy from the fact that its political programme is perceived as the opposite of occupation, and the opposition meet. Once this distinction is established we can proceed to debate the soundness of the relationship between framework and content, between form and meaning, between the means and the idea, all of which can be done from a perspective of general national awareness that the choice of true peace is a strategic one that cannot support the stagnation or procrastination often promised in the words of the Israelis, and always in their deeds.

We cannot enter the mind of the "other" to understand how he can conceive of the possibility of peace by insisting on total possession of the land and history, constantly announcing — in words and deeds — that he is the sole proprietor of everything, insatiably obsessed with archaeological digging that never testifies to the fact that the land and its history were without inhabitants.

To make of this obsession a policy seeking to establish peace by calling up a ghost simply to celebrate his absence, to negate his legitimacy and rights, drains the drama of anything beyond the self-congratulation of an author able to maintain a link between early superstitions and post-modernism, between a Zionism based on the non-existence of the Palestinian people and today's post-Zionism, liberated from the complex of the Palestinian question which is to be resolved without ever having been solved.

No, there is no natural life with occupation, or under occupation. Neither can those who continue to occupy lead a normal life with themselves. This is what the writings of A B Yehousha' reveal when he asks us to help him establish normal relations with his disturbed self.

Yes, the victim can provide moral support to tormented consciences within the society of his executioners, but only when the victim is enabled to creatively formulate his natural life. And this can never happen before the victim's right to existence is acknowledged; before due apology for injustice done is offered and before the procedures emanating from that apology are implemented.

Yet we remain here, in a zone of conflicting readings of the past: who did injustice to whom, and who should apologise to whom?

Israel's ideological position in a peace process that moves at a snail's pace dictates to the Palestinians conditions for existence reflecting a historical mentality that perceives of the Palestinians as remnants of the Arab conquerors of the land of Israel, and requires them to read their history and existence on the land as illegitimate.

The up-dated, pragmatic Israeli position, characterised by just enough tolerance not to derail the Arab-Israel peace train, would grant those Palestinians inhabiting the land of Judea and Samaria the right to reside on the outskirts of Jewish settlements.

Given this treatment the Israeli can tidy up the confused memory of the Palestinian and become free to establish normal relations with himself without this ever having involved recognising the Palestinian's right to the conditions that will lead to his own liberation and independence, or granting him equal civil rights that might enable the Palestinian to establish peace with himself.

One identity does not negate another. What confuses and stresses identity is to predicate its formation on the negation of the other. So for how long will the search for the natural continue in the realms of the supernatural, within the perimeters of an Israeli ideological insistence on establishing borders, ill-defined yet meticulous, precisely where the non-existent other exists? And for how long will this insistence on the ideological right to formulate the image of the other, his voice, his relation with himself, even his Pavlovian responses to what the Israeli wants him to be and not to be, continue?

As for us, there is nothing we can do except be what we want ourselves to be: normal people leading a normal life. This is our battle, in which we are engaged with all the lust we feel for freedom and peace. We shall not step backwards, we shall not return to exile, except...as the song dictates.

Al-Karmel, the mountain in Haifa, where Mahmoud Darwish grew up before leaving Israel 25 years ago, is also the name of the cultural periodical Darwish has edited, from different places in the Palestinian diaspora, for the past 15 years. The periodical, which ceased publication three years ago, reappeared this week, published in both Ramallah, where Darwish is based now, and Cairo. The text above forms the editorial of the new issue. It is printed here under a special agreement with the author who holds all copyrights.

Translated by **Mona Anis** and edited by **Nigel Ryan**

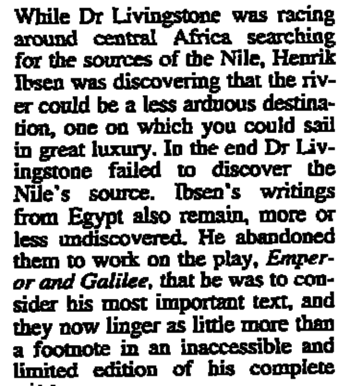
Mr Ibsen, I presume?

Arnvid Aakre examines Ibsen's forgotten writings of 1869, when the Norwegian playwright was visiting Egypt to attend the opening of the Suez Canal

While Dr Livingstone was racing around central Africa searching for the sources of the Nile, Henrik Ibsen was discovering that the river could be a less arduous destination, one on which you could sail in great luxury. In the end Dr Livingstone failed to discover the Nile's source. Ibsen's writings from Egypt also remain, more or less undiscovered. He abandoned them to work on the play, *Emperor and Galilee*, that he was to consider his most important text, and they now linger as little more than a footnote in an inaccessible and limited edition of his complete writings.

I came across them by racing, Livingstone like, around the miles of shelves in the University Library of Oslo. Suddenly I found myself holding an enormous volume in my hand, one of many, while a single phrase flashed through my mind: "Mr Ibsen, I presume?"

In the long poem *Peer Gynt* Ibsen takes the "unfaithful folk soul of the Norwegians" to Egypt. And in Cairo *Peer Gynt* witnesses the European politicking at its most insane, but only after meeting Anitra, a Bedouin girl, in the desert.





Edvard Munch illustration from *Peer Gynt*, above, and portrait of Ibsen

Peer Gynt was later dramatised for the stage. Edvard Munch illustrated many of the settings, while Edvard Grieg composed the *Peer Gynt* suite, including both Anitra's dance and an Arabic dance in the final composition. But ask any Norwegian about *Peer Gynt* and she or he will have forgotten the Egyptian settings; ask the same person about Greig's music and ten to one the only image that will come to mind is of the sun rising above Norwegian mountain peaks.

Ibsen also wrote a long poem, *Balloon-letter to a Swedish lady*, describing his impressions of Egypt which, certainly as regards the social organisation of Ancient Egyptian society, sounds many critical notes. The Balloon-letter also contains an explanation of the peculiar title. The absence of white carrier pigeons, Ibsen explains, in a land where "there are only black birds" necessitated the sending of the letter by balloon. Later, though, Ibsen contradicts this observation when he writes:

"A lonely marabou on two stiff legs, lowers its beak and bald head towards its chest and looks humanly sorrowful. Herons strut and pelicans dredge the mud, and from the fields ibis take to the air like a flock of white pigeons."

Ibsen actually came to Egypt at the request of the Swedish king, who had been invited to the celebrations to mark the opening of the Suez. Fortunately Ibsen's account of the event itself was written down by the Norwegian author Nordal Rolfsen:

"9 October, 1869. The Suez Canal, the new trade gate, is to be inaugurated, and Ismail, the khedive, Viceroy of Egypt, invited guests from all European countries. I was among them, and I can verify that his hospitality would not have been misplaced in a fairy-tale. First he insisted that we should see his country, and so we departed on Nile-boats to head upstream...

I remember the ruins of old Thebes... the acacia gardens of the Arabs...the old temples with their tremendous columns., the obelisks at the entrance... sphinxes high as two storey houses...

At Qena our ships lay awaiting the French Empress. It was almost sunset when far away a column of smoke rose up from the bright river, it came closer, and a magnificent Nile-boat glided towards us...

In the evening there was a ball at the Viceroy's grand palace. Here all nations seemed to meet in dance and it felt as if a wall between people had been razed."

Ibsen, recording in his own writings this Nile journey, remembers visiting the Temple of Osiris in Abydos. Offered the choice of a horse, camel or donkey to ride, he chooses the last, and en route to the temple notes that the Egyptian goats resemble nothing so much as those "palish, narrow-shouldered young English girls with twisted hair one meets all over Egypt". And later, in Luxor, he records buying a Pharaonic ring that once belonged to a princess, and reflects on the fact that the princess's finger is still attached.

The last words on Ibsen's impressions of Egypt should, though, go to Ibsen himself:

"A magical silence accompanies the landscapes of the Nile Valley. Today there is no puff of air to feel...and the river flows wide and full between its double edge of palm groves. Behind them the land rises on both sides to distant rows of mountains beyond which lies everything that the Nile is unable to reach...towards west the Libyan desert, and towards east the Arabian...

The interesting thing about travel in such strange surroundings is the understanding one comes to, little by little, that beneath what at first appears meaninglessness there is a certain order; that all this comprises the statements of the life of a community that has its law and its rules; and as time goes by and this recognition awakes, and the people come closer; the distance between the unknown and the familiar closes... in the end the realisation comes that nations are not so fundamentally different as one tends to believe.

A European tends, of course, to arouse attention when he shows himself here. Still decorum doesn't allow the Arab to let this show, least of all in any offensive way. He is measured and conducted, on all occasions friendly... Importunity is surely to be found among some of the classes that come most in contact with the traveller, donkey drivers and others, but there is still the question, among whom the guilt is to be found; and anyway the importunity is dressed in such an innocent form that it...cannot excite indignation...

I went further and further and I came out in the corn fields behind the village, and through them to the border of the desert. The sun was about to set behind a cluster of palm trees whose long shadows were tossed towards me on the yellow sand plain. Never have I felt the peace of sunset so much as here in Egypt. At home it always came over me with a force of uneasiness, that made the mind heavy and drove me to seek company. Here, where the hermit was born, one understands this idea, as one in Italy learns to understand how one can go in to the cloister and feel happy about it.

A wonderful night that followed...raised in beauty. The stars leaped full and round into the transparent dark blue sky. A smooth fog placed itself over the Nile Valley and transformed the landscape... as vessels drifted by with the stream. A paper-lantern shined large and red on the prow; the crews' monotonous rhythmical song was carried to us to die away further down the river. We Scandinavians have united in silence; I am sure that our thoughts went northwards. At such moments one can only wish reconciliation with all human beings, and ask oneself; how come that you deserved to see this glory?"

Plain Talk

A cartoonist friend of mine handed me a few of his works about the environment, just drawings with no captions. One look at the cartoons conveyed to me the message which the artist wanted to communicate to his readers — or shall I say viewers? No amount of text could have hit the target like those ink drawings.

A single cartoon can carry a great deal of information. I remember when, back in the seventies, I was involved in organising campaigns for family planning. And the first people we approached were cartoonists for the simple reason that in a country with high levels of illiteracy a drawing can be far more effective than a brochure. In Egypt cartoons have always been used to express opinions that, otherwise, would be incommunicable. Sophisticated messages are conveyed, messages full of political and social meaning.

A study of the development of cartoons in Egypt would reveal their close association with political events. During the British occupation political ideas were expressed through cartoons. After independence cartoonists served as watch dogs, revealing corruption and graft. Criticism of ministers, for instance, was always expressed in cartoons. I still remember cartoons of some old party leaders and ministers drawn by famous artists like Saroukhan, regarded as the father of political cartoons in modern times. Salah Jahin, who inherited Saroukhan's mantel, published cartoons in *Al-Ahram* which were more effective than leading articles or lengthy analyses.

At the moment cartoonists are having the time of their life. With the removal of censorship and an increasingly liberal atmosphere scathing cartoons have appeared, dealing with every subject imaginable. Ahmed Ragab and Mustafa Hussein have created many a laugh at corruption, bribery and embezzlement among high ranking officials in both the private and the public sector.

What characterises cartoons is the fact that they never die. Cartoons survive long after the events they describe are over and done with. In a way, cartoons are like paintings recording events that one might otherwise forget. Indeed, some cartoons have brought out their works in a book form. It is a delight, for example, to go through Jahin's collection of cartoons and reminisce over past events and occasions. His cartoons are not always meant to be funny; in most cases they are very serious. Of course a certain dash of humour is essential in a cartoon. It's a way of poking fun, but as the Arabic saying goes "the worst of calamities are those which evoke laughter".

And this is the great strength of cartoons, that they can encourage us to view events that we find disturbing with the distance that is necessary to allow us to analyse situations with the kind of detachment that is essential if we are ever to learn the lessons of history. They can mediate between a gut reaction, which might be immediately dismissive, and, a more considered opinion. And by provoking a smile, they allow us to see just how vain glorious our fellow men and women, as well as ourselves, can be.

Nor should we be inclined to view cartoons as some minor, insignificant art, simply because they are a form with which we have become over familiar, given their appearance in daily newspapers and magazines. Cartoons have always, after all, attracted the greatest artists of the day. One need only think of Goya's series "The Sleep of Reason," of the work of artists during the Wiemar Republic, to see just how powerful the medium could become in the hands of fine artists. And certainly those artists who have practiced the form — from Goya to Grosz — have hardly ever pulled their punches when it came to the message they sought to convey. Many of Goya's cartoons were, after all, a searing indictment of the corrupt practices of the Catholic establishment, while the work of the Wiemar artists constitutes a powerful critique of the ailments that eventually undermined the republic and led to the ascendency of Hitler and his National Socialists.

Cartoons, then, are a powerful medium. In a few lines the cartoonist can deflate pomposity, expose the shortcomings of would be leaders, and even make the man in the street laugh at himself.

Mursi Saad El-Din

New law for NGOs?

Fourteen thousand Egyptian NGOs are on the alert to see if rumoured changes in the controversial law governing non-governmental organisations will materialise, reports Mariz Tadros

Recent press reports have claimed the government is currently preparing a new law to replace Law 32 of 1964, which regulates the establishment, operation and liquidation of fourteen-thousand NGOs in Egypt. Law 32 has been criticised by NGOs and human rights organisations for allegedly imposing severe restrictions on civil action in the country, but NGO representatives interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* were not celebrating yet at reports that the law may be repealed. Some were worried that a new law may prove even more restrictive of their activities than the current one.

According to Saadeddin Ibrahim, director of the Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies, the overall tone of Law 32 is prohibitive and constricting, giving the Ministry of Social Affairs a large measure of control over NGO activity. There are no less than 10 bureaucratic steps a group must go through to be registered as an NGO. Once established, added Ibrahim, ministry officials can "intervene freely in the registration, monitoring, and running of the NGO." He fears, however, that a new law would be even more restrictive than Law 32.

Abdel-Salam El-Banna, counsellor for the Ministry of Social Affairs, denied rumours that a new law was under consideration, while acknowledging that the current law was in need of amendment in certain areas, for example registration procedures, which, he said, needed to be simplified.

On the question of restrictions on NGOs working in human rights, El-Banna contended that "NGO work should not be mixed with politics. Some NGOs use human rights in an attempt to blacken the government's image." He justified the restriction of foreign donations on security grounds, contending that "there are a lot of dubious organisations which can bring in money for illegal purposes and in the interests of foreign agencies."

He also lashed out at NGO members who claim that the law is trying to control their organisations, describing them as "people who are working with foreign agencies and are totally dependent on their finance."

El-Banna maintained that NGOs are only liquidated for financial fraud, or if they pose a danger to Egypt's national security, as would be the case of an organisation serving as a front for militant activities.

Applying general civil laws to NGOs again would be impractical, he said, because there are so many of them. He repeatedly assured, however, that "no decision will be taken on any amendments until all parties have democratically contributed to the process."

Some NGOs have attempted to work around Law 32 or "ignore it", as Marie Assad, director of the Protection of the Environment from Pollution, based in Muqattam, put it. "My theory is that if you have a strong group of volunteers, a strong budget, your accounts are in order, and you do not need to resort to the ministry for assistance, financial or otherwise, then they leave you alone," asserted Assad. While her organisation did not face any problems in becoming officially established, which Assad ascribes to its backing by EQI (Environmental Quality International), opening up a branch of the organisation at Wadi El-Natroun proved to be a nightmare. "The problem is that the law gives enormous power to low-level bureaucrats to intervene in whatever way they like," she said.

Lawyer Mona Zul-Fiqqar believes it is time for Law 32 to be repealed. "It was drafted at a time when control was the basic goal. Now times have changed, the government's intentions have changed, and the new law should acknowledge and support that," she said.

A new law should be passed providing an incentive for a greater NGO role in economic development, and enabling them to take steps to become more self-sufficient and generate more jobs, she argued. Such a law, maintained Zul-Fiqqar, should follow the international legal model, which stresses transparency, accountability and autonomy. It should acknowledge the role of NGOs as partners of the government in development work, and as intermediaries between government and society.


During the month of Ramadan, the vegetable market of El-Tablita near Al-Azhar is a hub of activity. Apart from the usual fresh vegetables, *yamish* attracts many customers photo: Randa Shaath

But Negad El-Borai, director of the Group for Democratic Development (GDD), a recently established NGO, said: "We would like to spare the government the task of drafting a new law. All we are asking for is a return to the laws governing NGO activity before July 1952." Like Saadeddin Ibrahim, El-Borai fears that a new law will mean more restrictions for NGOs.

The GDD is not registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs as a private voluntary organisation. "We made the same choice that many other NGOs have made, and that is to register as a civil company," explained El-Borai.

Prior to 1964, NGO activity was regulated by Laws 49 of 1945, 66 of 1951 and 384 of 1956, El-Borai said. To establish an NGO, the members would simply present a request to the governor, who had the right to object in the Court of the First Instance if any of the prospective members had a criminal record. It was the governor's task to ensure that the establishment of the NGO would not pose a threat to national security, but it was allowed to function until the court ruled otherwise.

This is different from the current situation, in which the Ministry of Social Affairs can stop the establishment of an NGO for a variety of reasons, and may liquidate, amalgamate and transfer property and finances to and from whichever NGOs it deems appropriate. "The birth and death of an NGO is in the government's hands," El-Borai said.

A series of workshops organised by UNICEF to establish links between the government and NGOs revealed that low-level employees at the ministry had reservations about the law, according to Hanaa Singer, rural development officer at UNICEF. It appeared that officials at the Ministry of Social Affairs disagreed on the interpretation of certain articles of the law, and some felt they did not receive enough training and were ill-equipped to deal with NGOs.

Three options were discussed at the workshops: a new law regulating NGO activity, a return to the pre-1956 law, or amendments to the existing law. "The last one was the least popular because it was felt that the law has too many loopholes and cannot be improved upon," reported Singer.

Pot Pourri

Cold showers and sacrifices

At a fashionable *iftar*, young mothers and a few grandmothers are discussing the shortcomings of modern education, a topic second only in popularity to the lack of good servants. Randa, the mother of a three-year-old, smiles and says nothing. She has just solved her most pressing problem and is basking in her newly acquired peace of mind. Murad, her son, has been screaming every morning, refusing to go to kindergarten. Every morning for the past three months, she has had to drag him to school sobbing and practically wrench his arms from around her neck to push him into the classroom, her whole day spoiled after this painful scene.

She seriously considered quitting her job and staying at home, but her husband would have none of this. The boy had to become a man, he said. He might be suffering, but it was for his own good. Randa has never understood how suffering could improve someone's character. She remembers the long hours she wasted writing nonsensical lines as punishment for some misdemeanour her teachers had decided she was guilty of. At home it was no better. She spent most of her time in her room, pretending to study. Worst of all, she remembers the cold showers her mother used to push her under, every time she showed a little less than total submissiveness. At this very moment, her mother, sitting next to her, is lighting one of her long, slim cigars, and, as if reading her daughter's mind, is telling the gathering about cold showers. "My father ordered my governess to give me a cold shower every time I got too nervous," she is telling the attentive ladies. "He used to say it was the best cure for bad nerves." Randa, watching her mother pop one of the numerous pills lined up in front of her plate of uneaten *kunafa*, snickers: "Too bad you were never cured, mother." The older woman ignores the interruption, but makes a mental note never to tell this story when her daughter is around. Randa is becoming strange, daring to contradict her mother publicly and, worse, spoiling her best lines. She carries on nevertheless, explaining that she faithfully copied her parents' methods because she believed in their soundness, and her children are consequently well brought-up, not like some young people she could name, moving in and out of marriages without a thought to the harm they are causing. Randa wonders if her mother is aware that all the assembled ladies know about her brother Ahmed's recent fourth divorce. He had his share of cold showers and was sent to bed more often than not without dessert, a punishment she had escaped because her mother had soon realised that she hated sweets. Her parents had felt guilty, though, punishing their son. He was going to be a man one day, and had to be treated as such. This need for preferential treatment conflicted with their strict disciplinarian principles, but somehow they managed to resolve the contradiction by castigating him in a rather haphazard way, then rewarding him almost immediately afterwards. Confused at first, her brother had soon learned to play on his parents' ambivalence and, notwithstanding the cold showers and dry bread, had always done as he pleased and let the consequences take care of themselves.

Ahmed had been miserable at school, where stronger children bullied him regularly. His frail constitution, which had earned him points at home, had been of little use in fending off his schoolmates' brutality. Unable to hit back, he became prone to accesses of rage which he vented on weaker children. Ahmed and Randa's parents did not want to know about their problems at school and, as soon as he was old enough, Ahmed was playing hooky and getting himself into trouble. Their mother just kept punishing him every now and then, often unfairly, until she finally gave up. And daddy, always worried about the "family's reputation" and "Ahmed's future", had been there to "fix" things for him.

Ahmed was sent abroad to university because of his poor grades. When he came back, their parents' attitude changed. Suddenly, their son could do no wrong. They got busy finding him a suitable wife. No one was good enough, and their whole attitude conveyed the message that Ahmed should be the king of his castle, allowed to make the most outrageous demands on his wife. Now, after his most recent failure, Randa's mother is heaping blame on the poor woman who was "unable to make her son happy," conveniently omitting that she was number four. Randa, lost in thought, hears her mother saying what a good boy Ahmed has always been, because she and her husband "knew how to educate him properly." Does the woman know that her son is in the habit of flying into a rage at the slightest provocation, beating his wife of the moment, then running to his mother to complain that his life is unbearable? Randa does not think her mother is aware of these details. How could she be? Women don't go around talking about these things, especially not to their mothers-in-law. Randa herself found out only by accident, and kept quiet. She knows Ahmed will deny everything and her mother will accuse her of maligning her brother because "she had always been jealous of him."

Right now, Randa is not sure if good or bad education had anything to do with so many of her friends' "problems", their miserable state of mind, their frequent visits to psychiatrists or their multiple divorces, but she has been thinking a lot lately, slowly understanding a few things, finding her way around ideas. More importantly, she is beginning to feel better about herself. "I bought my son a cellular phone," says Randa suddenly. "Now he goes to school willingly. He knows that he can call me any time". Voices rise immediately in unanimous disagreement. "Her son needs his umbilical cord severed, he shouldn't be encouraged to remain a baby," they all agree. "Do you know this kind of behaviour is actually harmful?" they shriek. Randa does not care. She knows it was a crazy thing to do, and besides, there is talk of banning the gadget completely from school. But she also knows that by the time this happens she and Murad will have worked out a better way of saying goodbye every morning. Her guilty feelings are the reason she acts so brusquely when leaving him. She could give him a few more minutes and ignore the annoyed looks of the teacher trying to intimidate her. Murad would regain confidence. It's a matter of time. All her son needs is to know that he is not alone in an alien world. She is on his side. For the past few months, she has acted as if he was her enemy, refusing to conform to the norms, wanting to embarrass her. Now she accepts the fact that he may be more fragile than other boys, that she should let him adapt slowly, at his own pace; and if this does not work, well, she can always look for another kindergarten. "One should listen to children more, they tell you a lot," is what she is thinking now, hating herself for having followed the beaten path, ignoring her son's very personal needs.

She hears her mother advising her to try a cold shower first thing in the morning. "That will calm his nerves," she hears her cackle. "I wonder what makes you believe that using terrorist methods on little children helps them grow into sound individuals?" she asks the women, who are all looking at her. "Parents are afraid to fail, this is why they do all these unnatural things to their children which they call education. All children need from us is love and reassurance. They will do the rest, in their own good time." Randa smiles at her mother who, popping a couple more pills, is busy telling all and sundry that no mother has loved her children more than she has. "You punish them for their good," she crows, "and they are not even grateful for your sacrifices."

Fayza Hassan

Reclaiming the south

New hope for Upper Egypt? Azaiza, one of the poorest villages in Assiut, was targeted for a comprehensive development project

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in cooperation with the Assiut Governorate, initiated the Azaiza comprehensive development project three years ago, writes **Rania Abdel-Rahman.**

"The project aimed at developing women's health and hygiene awareness, opening literacy classes and contributing to economic development through circular loan projects for women," says Maj. Gen. Fouad Khalil, secretary-general of the governorate.

"We began by selecting health volunteers from among the village women and training them," says Dr Ahmed Rashad, head of health administration in El-Ghanaem province. The women were trained in first aid, environmental issues, and mother-and-child care.

According to Rashad, houses lacking potable water, electricity and other basic amenities were also enumerated. Over a thousand houses in the village have now been provided with water and electricity.

Each of the volunteers was made fully responsible for a certain field: hygiene, gathering women and children for inoculation, raising environmental consciousness or treating minor injuries and burns. Rashad asserts that polio and other children's diseases have been eradicated since the rate of compulsory vaccination was raised from 70 to 100 per cent.

When Minister of Health and Population Dr Ismail Salam visited the village on 6 December 1996, he was so impressed that he ordered that the project be provided with new equipment.

"The unit received the Medal of Excellency for 1996. Dr Salam also promised to provide the unit with a small maternity room so that women can go there instead of giving birth in their homes," Rashad adds.

Engineer Abdel-Gaber Abdel-Sayed, head of the local authority in Azaiza, says "the UNICEF commission helped to provide 99 houses with electricity and water in Azaiza and the small villages surrounding it. The poorest households in the village were targeted first."

UNICEF has also donated $75,000 to be put into circular loan associations for housewives who have no property. These women are either divorced, widows, or have sick husbands who cannot work, according to Abdel-Sayed.

"Over 30 literacy classes have been set up, attended by around 850 students aged between 15 and 45. Other classes aimed at eradicating illiteracy among young women were also established.

Young unemployed villagers also received loans for small projects. "Some of the young people are working as tutors in literacy training," according to Abdel-Sayed. Increasing employment opportunities is high on the government's agenda, since it is seen as one of the most effective ways of reducing the number of adherents to militant organisations.

One woman, Sabiha Antar, says she benefited from the loans. "I had nothing apart from my LE35 pension. Now I own two buffaloes and I have running water in my house."

Tawhida Salama, another loan recipient, says: "After I paid off everything I owed to the cattle project, I was able to make repairs to my house, which had collapsed in the earthquake."

Azaiza is seen by many as the perfect project, combining popular participation with the financial assistance of international organisations. It will serve as a model for many development efforts to come.

Sufra Dayma

Broad beans in rice and veal

Ingredients:
2 cups broad beans
1 1/2 cups rice
1/2 kilo small boneless veal chunks
3 1/2 cups veal stock
2 onions (finely chopped)
1/2 cup fresh dill (finely chopped)
Salt + pepper + allspice
Butter

Method:
Boil the veal chunks until cooked, drain stock and leave aside. Soak the rice in water for 20 minutes, wash and strain. Wash the beans and leave aside. Melt the butter in a cooking pan, add the onions and stir until yellowish, add the dill, stir it in, then add the beans and the stock. Bring to a boil covered, then lower the heat and leave to cook for 15 minutes. Add veal chunks, season, then add the rice. Bring to a boil once again. When the liquid is absorbed, stir all ingredients, then lower the heat and place pan over a simmering ring and leave to cook until rice is cooked. Serve hot with a rich green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Fade to grey

Nigel Ryan on few colours but fine food

The Taj Mahal, in the end, is really one of those names that should never be attached to a restaurant. It is simply too grand, and however many Taj Mahals there may be between here and Crouch End, however many red-flock-wall-papered high street Indian takeaways, the real Taj Mahal always looms in the back of your mind, reducing wherever you are sitting to its kitsch essentials.

Mohandessin's Taj Mahal, wary perhaps of comparisons, has opted for a minimal look. Colour has been banished from the interior in favour of shades of grey — grey walls, grey floors, subdued lighting, grey reed mats folded at the windows. And you enter this grey place by ascending a black industrial metal staircase. The result is that the restaurant feels over-designed, largely because, as an interior, it simply does not work. It feels anaemic, and leaves you longing for a splash of vulgarity, something loud, clashing and mirrored. The temptation is to order a glass of orange fizz, because orange is the navy blue of India and all this cool grey is just too cool.

And then it happens. The waiter approaches in his grey uniform and hands you the menu. And yes, the menu is grey, but it is printed on velour, and the velour is rolled so it can be contained in a silver case with antique patina and lots of fake turquoise embedded in the metal. You are happy you came. And the food is very good.

The menu is not overlong — an excellent sign — though it is extensive enough. From the unfurled grey velour we ordered amply — *samosa, murgh makhani, ghost shahi tikka, malai kofta, dal makhani, keema naan* and *lacha paratha.*

The *samosa*, containing potato, garlic, peas and, perhaps, a little spinach, were served with a yoghurt, mint and cumin dip and a side dish of onion rings pickled in sweet vinegar coloured with beetroot. An excellent opener and one that was not to be betrayed.

Murgh makhani — pieces of chicken in a very creamy tomato sauce tasting strongly of coriander — was fine, though I would have preferred it if the sauce had been a little less soupy. The *ghost shahi tikka*, boneless lamb in a mild marinade cooked dry, was equally good while the *malai kofta*, vegetable dumplings in a rich, tomato based sauce, were excellent. Nor did the *dal*, mildly curried brown lentils with cumin and fresh coriander, or the breads — *keema naan*, spread with a spiced vegetable paste, and the plain *lacha paratha* — disappoint. Together with plain long-grained rice, and a cucumber *raita*, this comprised lunch for two.

It was ambitious ordering, and though portions are not enormous, the quantities of food delivered to our table could easily have served three.

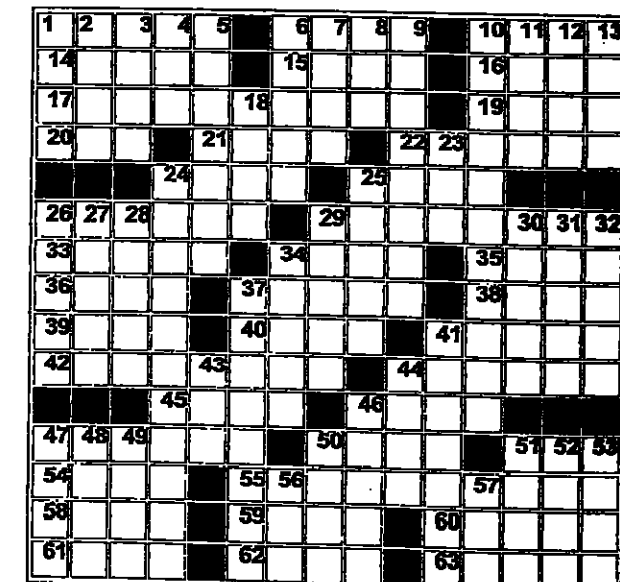
Nor is the Taj Mahal particularly expensive. The bill, when it arrived, was not quite LE130, which for cooking of this standard, in such a fashionably anaemic setting, is not over the top. It also included two tonic waters. The Taj Mahal does not serve alcohol during Ramadan.

Taj Mahal, 5, Lebanon Street, Mohandesseen. Tel: 30 25 699

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS
1. Fossilized resin [5]
6. Be defeated [4]
10. Debauchee [4]
14. Desist [5]
15. Uncovered [4]
16. Arm bone [4]
17. Result, hyph. wds [10]
19. Old-world pythons [4]
20. Bring to justice [3]
21. Female sheep [4]
22. Watch-chain with crossbar [6]
24. Songs set to music [4]
25. Dutch knife [4]
26. Coma; numbness [6]
29. Yellow gem; hyph. wds [8]
33. Sonances [5]
34. Shopping plaza [4]
35. Going at a snail's pace [4]
36. The Green Isle [4]
37. Sideways circular movement of horse [5]
38. Cur [4]
39. Passage; byway [4]
40. Wedding vows, 2 wds. pl. [4]
41. Assessed; scolded [5]
42. Enclosure in farm, hyph. wds [8]
44. Unsophisticated; friendly, snug [6]
45. God of War [4]
46. Small quantity of hair, smoke, etc. [4]
47. Recorder [6]
50. Irish Gaelic language [4]
51. University diploma, abb. [3]
54. Huff and puff [4]
55. Not divided into distinct parts [10]
58. Dueling sword [4]
59. Couch, bench or sofa [4]
60. At the foot of [5]
61. A meaningful element of speech [4]
62. Residence; lodging place [4]
63. One of the senses [5]

Last week's solution

DOWN
1. Masters [4]
2. Bill of fare [4]
3. Ordered [4]
4. Sixth sense [3]
5. Altar screen [7]
6. Veins in ore [5]
7. A composition [4]
8. Describing some wines [3]
9. Ravel [8]
10. Approve automatically without consideration [11]
11. Genus of bitter herbs [4]
12. Knot in wood [4]
13. Orient [4]
18. Debtor [4]
23. General in US Civil War [3]
24. Cordial and frank [11]
25. Sediments [5]
26. Rungs [5]
27. The Pentateuch [5]
28. Amalgamate [5]
29. Claw of bird of prey [5]
30. Crème de la crème [5]
31. Country bumpkin [5]
32. Weedy, jumbled [5]
34. Manners or methods [5]
37. Snakish [8]
41. Fashion as diamond with curved part in triangular facets [7]
43. Pref. meaning 'before' [3]
44. Express disapproval of person [4]
46. Pen [5]
47. Spit out; spurt [4]
48. Device on stringed instrument to adjust pitch [4]
49. Singular [4]
50. Dutch cheese [4]
51. Couches [4]
52. Ignore correction [4]
53. Wax found at base of some birds' beaks [4]
56. Modern, comb. form [3]
57. Genetic messenger [3]

Ramses' new face

Cairo's busiest square is suddenly looking more inviting. Is this the end of tiresome traffic jams? **Shaden Shehab** drives through Ramses square and surveys the changes

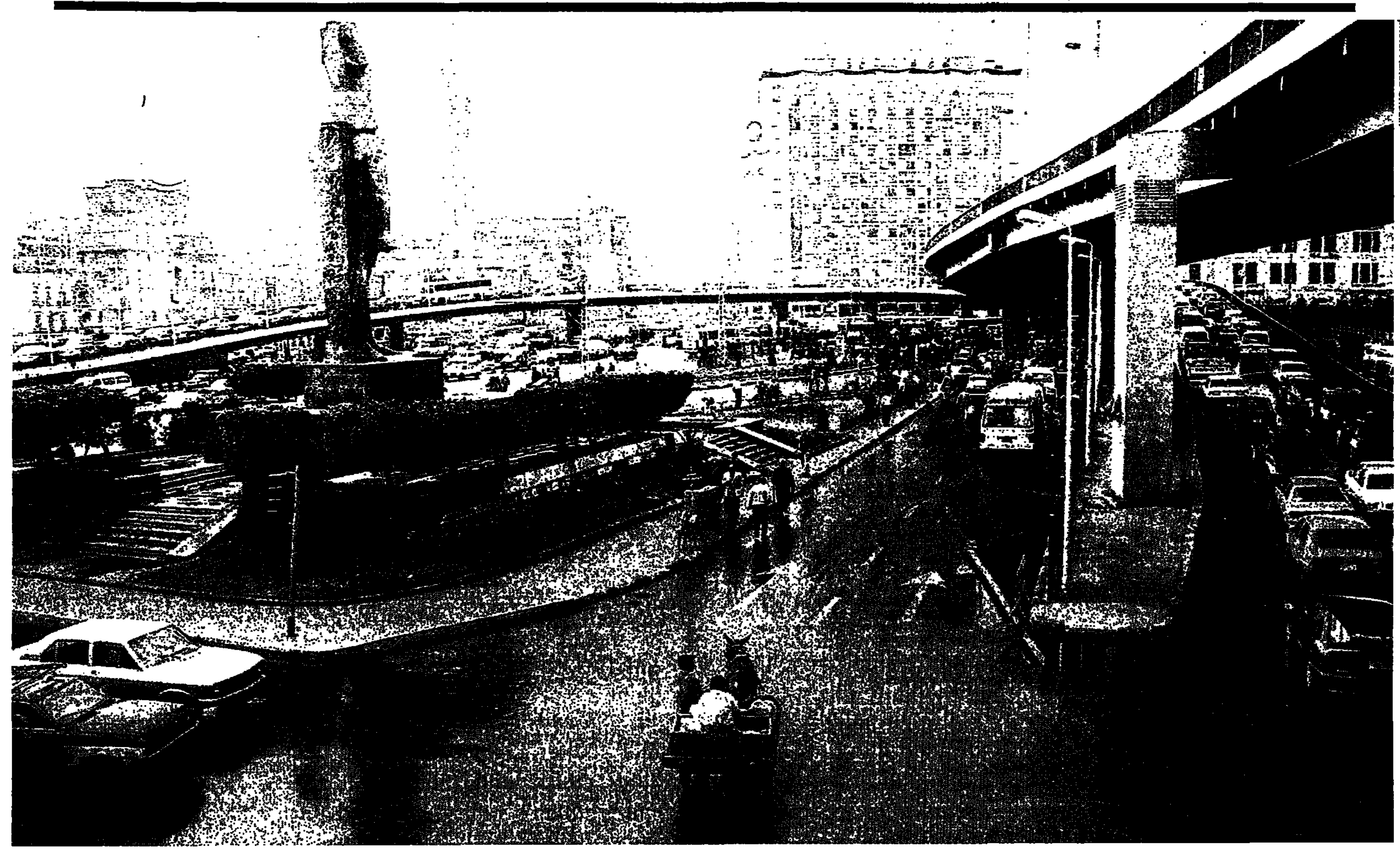


photo: Randa Shaath

Clearing the way: Amongst the changes at Ramses Square are alternative traffic routes

A dozen cars are vying for the three-centimetre space in between your car and the one next to you. Two cars ahead, a minibus with people spilling out of it has suddenly stopped dead in its tracks. A family of four, balancing suitcases on their heads, is trying to squeeze through traffic to get to the train station. An elegant pharaoh — the statue of Ramses II — surveys the scene with stony indifference. Welcome to Ramses Square.

Perhaps the densest, busiest intersection in Cairo, Ramses Square is notorious for making taxi drivers cringe at the thought of driving there. In fact, many demand a bit of palm greasing before they agree to brave the labyrinth that is Ramses Square. According to official statistics, 45,000 people pass through the square during a given peak hour.

Until now, those who did venture through the area were mired in some of the worst traffic jams known to mankind. But, just over a month ago, Cairo Governorate workers began implementing a plan to lighten the load.

"It is no secret that Ramses Square was unbearably chaotic. There was no order at all and that is why Cairo Governorate decided to re-plan it," said Magdi Amin, head of the Cairo Cleaning Authority.

Ramses Square's new look was designed by a group of engineering experts including university professors. Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher had the plans revised several times before they were finally approved, according to Amin. Yet, work on the second metro line, opened last October, and the sewage system delayed implementation.

Ahmed Sultan, deputy governor of Cairo, explained that changes have included designating areas for various means of public transport and beautifying the area. Total renovation costs neared LE2 million, he added. LE1.5 million was spent on road works, LE150,000 for lights, LE250,000 for a new bus terminal, LE50,000 for landscaping and LE50,000 for repainting surrounding buildings.

To lighten the flow of cars and buses through the square, adjustments were made to transportation routes. Mohamed Abdel-Aziz, head of the roads department at the Cairo Governorate, told the *Weekly* that traffic coming from Tahrir square to the railway station no longer turns left after painfully making its way through several intersections. Traffic now moves right, in the direction of El-Fath Mosque, and onto Faggala Street. From there, it turns left onto Youssef Wahba Street, cutting across Ramses Street to arrive at the railway station directly. "It may sound like it is more time-consuming, but we have tried the new route and found that at peak hours, the new route only takes four minutes," Abdel-Aziz noted.

Ramses Station in 1969

Part of the pavement on which the massive statue of Ramses II stands was removed to provide more space for cars coming from Heliopolis and Abbassiya via the October Bridge to Galaa Street.

"Traffic moves much easier now. You can even feel it during Ramadan when it is usually much more crowded," taxi driver Mahmoud Selim commented.

Officials are experimenting with the idea of shortening the above-ground metro route. "The metro crowds the square because it uses at least seven metres which could be used for public buses," Abdel Aziz said. However, he added, "This decision is not final, we are experimenting for a month and if it doesn't work, the metro will run its regular route."

The metro experiment has caused quite a bit of controversy. "I used to take the metro every day from Heliopolis to its final stop at Abdel-Moneim Riyadh Square. Now I have to take an additional means of transportation from Ramses Square to Abdel-Moneim Riyadh Square, which means I have to leave home at least half an hour earlier," complained Mona Shawkat, a civil servant.

Yet Sultan counters that the controversy is blown out of proportion because only a limited number of people use the metro. He explained that the metro trip from Heliopolis to one stop before the square takes 25 minutes, whereas it finishes its trip to Abdel-Moneim Riyadh Square in 35 minutes. "We have offered alternatives: A ticket to Abdel-Moneim Riyadh Square is also valid for the underground metro or a bus," Sultan said.

Bus traffic has been given a make-over as well. A new orange and green terminal now shelters passengers who are waiting to ride the bus. Under the old "system" buses stopped just in front of the railway station, causing a great deal of congestion. The terminal is now located in front of the Everest building, the tallest building in Ramses Square. And, as Sultan explained, "a great number of public buses will not even pass through the square." The flow is much more organised: buses stop at designated lanes depending on their direction. People can now wait for them on comfortable wooden benches in the shade. Plants and flowers brighten the islands separating lanes.

"The bus terminal at the railway station used to be a big mess — we had to run back and forth to find out which bus was going where. Now each bus has its designated lane," said Tarek Bayoumi, a civil servant. "The fact that we can sit in the shade while waiting for the bus is also a great comfort."

The new plan prohibits microbuses from crossing the square. Microbuses servicing the north and east should now stop in front of the railway station by Lamoon Bridge. Microbuses servicing the south and west will stop in front of the Fath Mosque, moving from Ramses Street to El-Gomhouria Street, said Sultan.

"The public is still not used to this system, so we sometimes still stop at Ramses Square, because this is where we always used to pick passengers," said Attiya Awad, a microbus driver.

Atef El-Meligui, a civil servant, believes that old dogs can't learn new tricks: "Microbuses will never follow the new regulations. Even if they are now, which is not the case, they will take their old routes as soon as all the traffic police leave the square."

Others point out that the new plan for microbuses does not prevent crowds — it simply moves them. "What was done is great but the problem of microbuses still exists since instead of crowding the square they crowd the area in front of El-Fath Mosque. The problem was moved from one place to the other," said Mohamed Ismail, a shop owner. "They should be moved to a less crowded area."

Fences surround the square to prevent pedestrians from crossing above ground. "We are trying to make people use the underground to cross the square," said Sultan. "It will take some time for people to get used to it but we are intent on success. The square is for cars not pedestrians."

"The idea of pedestrians crossing underground is great but people need to be shown the new route," said Abbas Mohamed Ali, a local vendor.

Many people said they would not use the underground pass to cross the streets because it is already crowded. "Nothing will make me go down there to cross the street," said Mohamed Amin, a plumber.

The Ramses renovations are complemented by cosmetic ones. Huge golden plant pots are scattered on the pavements beside the fences. Pots also hang from the pillars of the Sixth of October Bridge. Some buildings as well as the bridge were given a fresh coat of paint.

But, one problem which still persists is that of street vendors. The area underneath the Sixth of October Bridge, where most vendors gathered, has been landscaped.

"We are chasing street vendors day and night. The head of the utilities police and his team are working all day to complete this mission," Sultan said. Asked if they are likely to come back, he replied, "It can't be guaranteed but we are doing our best."

The last change scheduled to take place is moving the statue of Ramses II himself. The daily press has announced that this Herculean task will begin within the next two weeks. However long it may take, it is clear that Ramses will have to go. His next destination remains unknown.

Satan sensation

Cult recruits, say some; just Westernised teens, others contend. **Amira Howeidy** examines the evidence in the case against the "devil worshippers"

"I was scared out of my wits. The security forces searched the house and asked me to come with them. I didn't know what they wanted at first," said one 19-year-old girl, among the 78 teenagers arrested last week.

It was 4.30am when security forces descended on the affluent Cairo neighbourhoods of Zamalek, Mohandessin and Heliopolis. In Alexandria, too, they knocked on the doors of wealthy businessmen and celebrities and arrested their children, accused of practising "obscene" rituals.

Speaking to the *Weekly* on condition of anonymity, the girl explained: "I later discovered that my boyfriend and I were suspected of worshipping Satan, just because we had attended a rock concert."

After State Security Police (SSP) interrogated the defendants, 34 were released. The remaining 44 will spend 15 days in custody, until 6 February, according to Hani Borham, SSP senior prosecutor.

"It was the worst experience I've had in my life," the 19-year-old girl told the *Weekly*. She was subsequently released after being found "innocent".

A series of articles published three months ago by the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef* about "devil worshipping" in Cairo first stirred scepticism, then suspicion. Last week's arrests, in the middle of Ramadan, sent shock waves through Egyptian society.

Members of parliament debated the issue this week during the People's Assembly's Sunday session. And newly-appointed Mufti Nasser Farid Wassel denounced the alleged Satanists as apostates. "If they renounce their beliefs they may be pardoned, but if they persist in their sin we should carry out the penalty prescribed by Islamic law," he said. The penalty for apostasy is death.

The "devil worshippers", according to the opposition newspaper *Al-Wafd*, "made astonishing confessions" such as drinking the blood of rats, having group sex, digging up corpses and burning the Qur'an — all allegedly "to please the devil".

So far, the only evidence the SSP have gathered to support these claims are T-shirts printed with "strange designs"; posters and CDs of heavy metal, reggae and hard rock groups; and tickets to recent music concerts.

"We know we do not have sound evidence against the defendants. They have not confessed anything yet," stated senior prosecutor Borham. "We released half of them because there was nothing against them, and also because some were girls."

Borham explained that the SSP issued arrest warrants after investigation reports found that some "young elements" were practising "devil-worshipping" rituals and propagating "extremist" thoughts. According to Borham, the youths used hard rock music to spread "the destructive and immoral" cult of devil worshipping.

The SSP's investigations have turned up no more than a few video tapes of a hard rock concert, held on 20 December and attended by alleged Satanists. "Persistence of Pain" and "Opacity" were the two heavy metal groups who headlined the concert, which was sponsored by five multinational companies.

Salah Abdel-Met'al, a Cairo University sociology professor and researcher with the Social and Criminal Studies Centre, explained that most Egyptians were shocked by the ideas and practices of the supposed Satanists, not just because they may have worshipped the devil or practised obscene rituals, "but because of the degree of Westernisation dominating their behaviour and other segments in our society — a society which is conservative by nature."

Despite the various manifestations of Westernisation in Egypt that have become visible since the open-door policy was initiated in the seventies, many believe that the trend has intensified during the past five years. The "Americanisation wave", as social scientists and commentators call it, has become far more visible with the proliferation of American fast-food corporations. Hard-core, homegrown rock groups such as Terra, Steel Edge, Cartoon Killers, Andromeda and Rock In are modelled after Western music groups. And television advertisements which use English vocabulary, a growing number of English-language publications on local news-stands, satellite dishes and the Internet all propagate Western culture. SSP officer Sameh Abu Zeid also sees a "foreign influence" behind the so-called Satanists: "They gave money to the poor for guns," he said, "and now they are spreading destructive ideas in order to target the wealthier segments of society."

Abdel-Met'al agrees that "the political dimensions of the issue should by all means be taken into consideration, but we should not limit this to 'foreign forces'." Egyptian youth find themselves in a vacuum, he said, "so we should not be surprised to find them turning to another culture, or standing around in front of fast-food restaurants, with all the cultural domination that these imply."

But Akram El-Sharif, a 20-year-old American University in Cairo student studying political science, said that the concert in question "was nothing more than a standard rock concert attended by around 350 people."

El-Sharif, who designed the concert's posters and tickets (which were both collected as "evidence") noted that "everybody knew that the show was being video-taped and, logically, nothing happened." The tape itself is proof of this, he said. He pointed out that most of those arrested had attended the concert. Concert organiser and musician Nagi Salib, who is currently in prison, "has always written good lyrics. He comes from a very religious family. This is all very unfair," El-Sharif protested.

The defendants have not yet been charged. If there is sufficient evidence against them, Botham explained, they will be accused of "propagating extremist thought and deriding monotheistic religion in a way that may threaten national unity or undermine social stability". The punishment upon conviction could be a prison term ranging from six months to five years and a fine of LE500.

Despite their widespread use in the media, the words "Satanism", "black music", "heavy metal" and "death metal" remain very ambiguous terms to most Egyptians, SSP officers, and even the alleged Satanists themselves. "Many of the youth I interrogated do not really know what Satanism is and said that they either imitated their friends or Western musical bands," SSP officer Sameh Abu Zeid told the *Weekly*.

The girl who spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* after being released explained: "My guess is that those Satanists, if there are any, are just some young people who want to have fun in their own way. We often go to concerts where they play heavy metal music and hard rock. We head-bang and dance wildly, but it's all part of having a good time."

The only thing that links the alleged Satanists with each other, said Abu Zeid, "is their membership, to which they confessed, in a club known as the 'Dome Club' whose leader, Khaled Madani, is directly involved in Satanic rituals but was unavailable for interrogation," said Abu Zeid. The SSP officer said the "cult headquarters" were located at a popular meeting place for Westernised teens in Heliopolis.

Contrary to media reports, none of those who were arrested confessed that they dug up dead bodies in the Commonwealth Cemetery in Heliopolis. "But they said they heard of people who did, whom we don't have for interrogation," Abu Zeid added.

According to security sources, the likelihood that the "Satanists" will get prison sentences is very slim as long as legal evidence remains flimsy. "But this does not mean that they are harmless," said Borham. "The real danger in these young people is not the fact that they may harbour destructive, immoral thoughts, but that they might spread them. This makes them extremely dangerous."

Showcasing Old Cairo

The changes taking place in Old Cairo are much faster than plans to preserve its identity. By Jill Kamil

It is not unusual in Egypt for development plans to become out-dated before their implementation. What is so surprising in this case is that nothing is being done, either to hold back the current of unplanned change, or speed up execution of the proposal.

I refer to USAID's master plan for Old Cairo. The plan to solicit proposals for "the preservation and presentation" of the area was announced by the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE) and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) in June 1996, with a declared deadline of September 19, 1996. This deadline has long since passed. Meanwhile, there is every indication that by the time a decision has been made as to who will carry out the project, and it actually commences, the area will have changed so drastically as to render it completely defunct.

Last week I visited Old Cairo and saw huge earth-moving equipment digging a ditch through the Greek Orthodox cemetery to the west of the proposed project area. The pottery factories to the north, few in number until last year, now extend the full length of Sharia Ain As-Sira. A new parking lot, presumably for tourist buses, is under construction on Sharia Mar Girgis, an area described in the plan as "frequently choked with traffic." Most disturbing, however, is the fact that part of the old city has been levelled to the ground.

In the area approached from the garden of the Coptic Museum, down the stairway beyond the Greek Orthodox Church, I found before me, in place of the ancient wall, a vast open space. An empty lot. And, surprisingly, not one particle of debris in sight. Clearly the evil deed had been done under cover, perhaps at night, and all evidence removed.

Could it be that the canny residents of Old Cairo had gotten wind of the development plans and decided to take matters into their own hands while there was still time? After all, it has been done before.

Years ago, several buildings in the area facing the rear entrance of Saint Sergius (Abu Sarga) Church were demolished. In their place, a huge glass-fronted commercial outlet was built, stocking a vast array of tasteless items and bric-à-brac ranging from bizarre copies of Tutankhamun's throne to ancient statues that would make the pharaohs turn in their graves. Undoubtedly the work of some of Coptic Cairo's wealthier residents.

The project area lies within the Old Roman Fortress of Babylon and includes the Coptic Museum, several Coptic churches and a synagogue. One of the main planning and preservation issues concerns access to the site by private cars, taxis and tour buses. A new parking lot, as previously mentioned, has already been built. The master plan also calls for the evaluation of "the location and design of gift and crafts shops." It did not escape my notice, however, that countless small shops have already sprung up in the area, leaving little space for the "USAID-planned design."

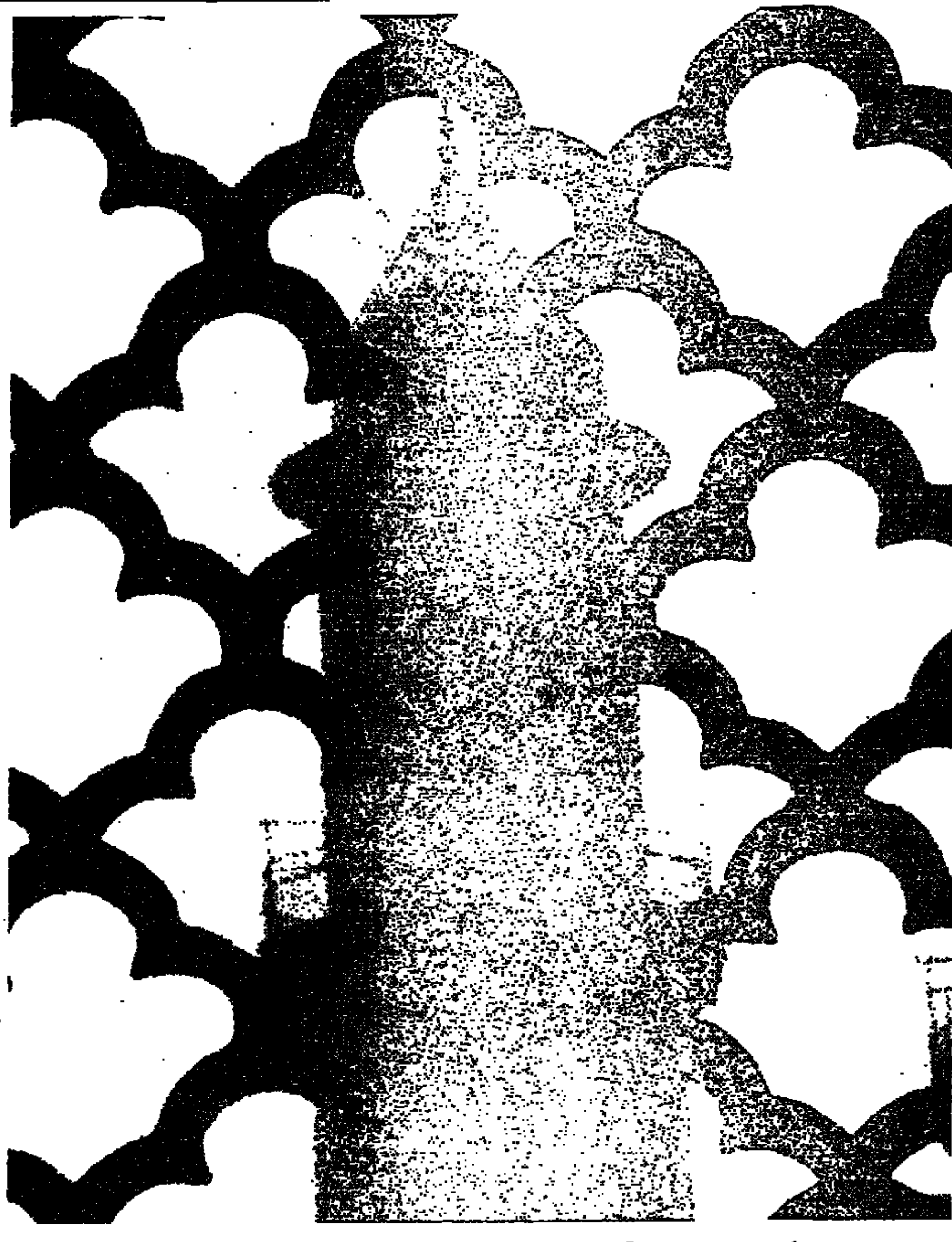
With sewage pipes, a parking lot, pottery factories and small shops outside the walls of the ancient city, and a large levelled area inside, one wonders where the "visitor centre" and "visitor orientation kiosk" will go, let alone "the necessary public toilets, telephones and other facilities" as detailed in the plan. Furthermore, who's to say how many additional buildings will be demolished in the coming weeks.

Although the master plan mentions that a thoughtful balance needs to be struck between the residents of Old Cairo "who have legitimate expectations of privacy... community expression and tranquillity," and "visitors....who have legitimate expectations of adequate public facilities," this terminology makes the former sound like quaint inhabitants of a medieval city, rather than the ambitious, modern people they are. What is apparent from recent events in Old Cairo is that instead of "privacy" and "tranquillity", they want involvement — and they are not willing to wait for it to be handed to them.

While the first to agree that Misr El-Qadima, as the area is more widely known, needs attention, I do question the advantages of showcasing the area. It is all very well thinking in terms of street furniture, trash receptacles and lighting, but to additionally specify provisions for the handicapped, is akin to calling for the burial chamber inside the Pyramid of Khufu to be made accessible to people in wheelchairs. It is simply unrealistic.

The situation is not static. Even as "an analysis of commercial activities and their space" moves ahead, if and when one of the proposals is finally accepted, efforts to elaborate the plan may well be rendered obsolete while still on the drawing board. At the rate things are moving in Old Cairo, all will have changed.

Jill Kamil is the author of Coptic Egypt: History and Guide, two chapters of which are devoted to Old Cairo and the Coptic Museum.



From atop a minaret

CHILDREN playing with lanterns, schoolgirls fixing their head scarves, women struggling with heavy shopping bags and drivers endlessly trying to steer their way through the narrow streets of Islamic Cairo are all characteristics of the holy month of Ramadan in the city's oldest quarter.

However, looking at these sites from the top of one of the hundreds of minarets that dot the city's skyline is a different experience altogether.

The picture becomes complete, more holistic. Things come together, and the true nature of the city reveals itself.

Minarets are a, if not the, primary feature of Islamic architecture. They can be viewed in clusters from the elevated Citadel, or individually almost anywhere in Cairo — just by looking up.

Even when their interior stairs are no longer traversed five times a day by the *muezzins* calling the faithful to prayer, the majestic minarets still capture the attention of passers-by.

While wandering through the top floor of *Sabil-Kuttab* Abdel-Rahman Katkhuda, photographer **Sherif Sonbol**, shot this photo of the minaret of the *Madrassa*-Hospital-Mausoleum of Sultan El-Mansour Qalawoon.

The *Sabil-Kuttab* and the Qalawoon complex are two of the most interesting landmarks on El-Muezz Liddin Allah Street.

What's on?

Ramadan deals

Semiramis Inter-continental
Oriental delicacies will be provided for Iftar *at the Felucca Brasserie and Spaghetteria restaurants. Kheimet El-Fawanees, in the Cleopatra ballroom, will provide* Sohour *and late night oriental shows with a group of famous Egyptian performers. Minimum charge for* Sohour *is LE40 except Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays when the minimum charge is LE50. The Night & Day is also open 24 hours a day, offering an array of delicious selections. The Grill restaurant offers sophisticated French dining from 7pm, while Los Amigos features Mexican cuisine and live entertainment daily from 6pm.*

Mövenpick Heliopolis
Iftar *and* Sohour *are being served daily at the Orangerie restaurant. For entertainment after* Iftar, *the Dawwar provides* shisha, *backgammon, oriental drinks and food.*
Special halls have been prepared to receive private Iftar *and* Sohour *gatherings.*
Special accommodation prices are offered during the holy month of Ramadan for Egyptians and foreign residents. LE270 for a single or double room and LE330 for a room overlooking the garden and swimming pool. The rates include service charge and taxes.
Day use is available from 9am to 8pm. Garden rooms are LE180 while regular rooms are LE150. Rooms can be used by up to four persons.

Al-Salam Swissôtel
An Iftar *buffet will be served in the Samara restaurant — selections will be changed daily. The Kheima of Ya Salam will be opened daily to guests for* Sohour, *entertainment, singing and* shisha.

Nile Hilton
Iftar *and* Sohour *will be served daily at the Ibis Cafe, Abu Ali Oriental Cafe and Gawharat El-Nil. The prices of the* Iftar *buffets range from LE54 to LE70 plus service charge, sales tax and the government tax. The buffets include oriental delicacies, soups and desserts. For entertainment, the Abu Ali Cafe is open daily from 7pm to 3am.*

Pyramids Park Hotel Inter-continental
Iftar *is being served at the Sultan restaurant for LE55, including all taxes. The Bein El-Qasrein tent, next to the Sultan restaurant, is open for* Sohour *from 6pm to 2am daily. A la carte* Souhour *items, hot and cold beverages and* shisha *are also available at regular prices with no minimum charge.*

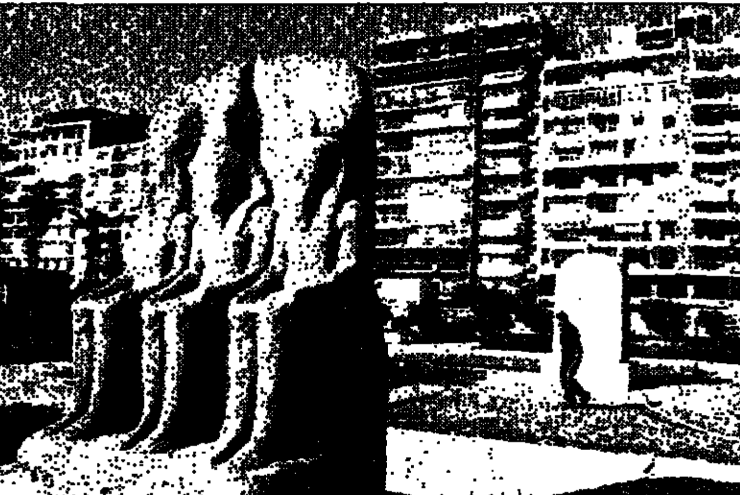
El-Gezira Sheraton
Iftar *is being served daily in the oriental tent, Layalina, while* Sohour *is being served in the Ramadana tent with a special programme.*

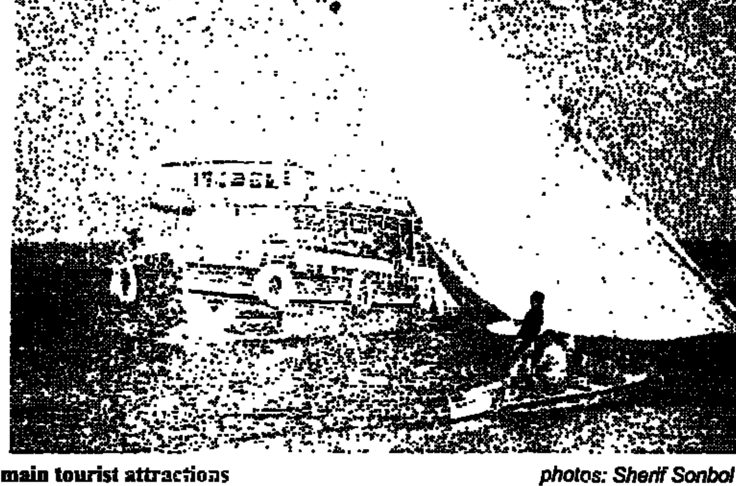
Forte Grand Pyramids
Iftar *and* Sohour *are being served in Kom El-Dekka with daily entertainment programmes. Special packages are available for groups.*

Sonesta Hotels
Special prices are offered by Sonesta hotels for Egyptians and foreign residents during the month of Ramadan:
Sonesta Hotel Cairo LE96 per person per night in a double room, including buffet breakfast, service charge and tax.
Sonesta Nile Cruises $280 for 5 days/4 nights per person in a double cabin including full board and sightseeing.
Sonesta Beach Resort, Hurghada LE133 per person per night in a double room based on a half board accommodation and including service charge and taxes.
Ambassador Club LE105 per person per night in a double room based on half board accommodation and including service charge and taxes.
Sonesta Paradisio, El-Gouna LE140 per person per night in a double room based on half board accommodation and including service charge and taxes.
Sonesta, Port Said LE114 per person per night in a double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.
Sonesta Beach Resort, Sharm El-Sheikh LE150 per person per ni in a double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Travels to Port Said





The new museum (left), the port and the de Lesseps monument (below) are the main tourist attractions

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Port Said's tourist potential has not been fully tapped but, as Mahmoud Bakr finds out, there is every reason to be optimistic about plans for the future

Port Said bustles with visitors when ships dock. A great many passengers make the short trip to Cairo to visit the world-famous monuments and museums, while the remainder opt to peruse the many local attractions. As a tax free zone, the city also attracts Arab tourists in large numbers and some foreigners — but there it ends. Despite its many historical and natural attractions, tourism has not "taken off" in Port Said.

"We have great tourism potential," said Hamed El-Shennawi, chairman of the Chamber of Touristic Companies in Port Said. "There are expansive beaches, numerous hotels, archaeological sites and a military museum which recounts the history of Port Said. In addition, we have a mild climate year-round and easy access to Lake Manzala, the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal. We are trying to attract more people to Port Said."

Perhaps the greatest attraction is its vast beaches. One stretches over 50km along the Mediterranean coast, while others border Lake Manzala and the Suez Canal.

"We are attempting to promote bird-watching and hunting on the lake," said El-Shennawi. "The first hunting season began in November and we prepared brochures on this activity for distribution to tourists."

"Another activity which could be attractive is fishing — especially in Al-Gamil region. Our objective is to diversify our tourist product," El-Shennawi explained.

Port Said's historical attractions are many. The Port Said Museum includes exhibits that extend from the Stone Age through the present, including the Pharaonic, Coptic, and Islamic eras. The Military Museum has memorabilia from the 1956 and 1967 wars. The Art Museum displays paintings and plastic arts from generations of artists. Both the Suez Canal Authority building, constructed in 1882, and the cemetery of the Allied Forces during the second world war are open to the public. "The city's very streets are noteworthy," commented El-Shennawi, "Port Said Street displays a mixture of the city's Egyptian and European architectural legacies."

Among the upcoming projects, and one that is expected to yield enormous returns, is the construction — already under way — of a marina for yachts. "It is a known fact that yacht harbours in the Mediterranean yield large sums for Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta. We want to reap the benefits of this tourism trend," said El-Shennawi.

"We are currently attempting to create what is called 'consciousness of shopping tourism' among merchants, where the quality and diversification of commodities available in Port Said becomes better-known. Southeast Asia and Dubai have exploited this potential and there is no reason why Port Said should not do the same."

Port Said has several tourist villages, including Al-Noras, Al-Fardos, Marhaba and Paradise in Al-Gamil, and investors are taking an interest in the area, especially along the beaches. While all those involved in tourism in Port Said are proud of what they already have, they realise they have a long way to go, that the 'Golden Age of Port Said' is a long way off.

Mohamed Hattab, secretary-general of the governorate, said that Port Said is paving roads along the coast to encourage the establishment of villages, "and planning extensions of the eastern and western coasts of the city to accommodate specialised tourist resorts. We are also about to establish a multi-purpose promenade for commodities and transit passengers, as well as another one for local residents and visitors. This is a big step forward."



Boosting African tourism

NEARLY 200 travel agents, hoteliers and tour operators representing 14 African countries will convene in Cairo next October to discuss problems and means to boost tourism in their countries, reports **Rehab Saad**. "Cairo is hosting the meeting of the All African Travel and Tourism Association (AATTA) for the third time since its formation in 1985," said Mohamed Abu Salem, deputy chairman of the association. He added that he is now contacting the Ministry of Tourism, the Egyptian Tourist Authority and the Chamber of Tourism to prepare for the event.

The AATTA, whose headquarters are located in Dar es Salam, started its work in 1985 and held its first meeting in Arusha, Tanzania. Today it includes 14 member states among which are Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana, Zaire, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. "The association was originally formed to promote and coordinate tourism throughout the African countries, and to curtail the apparent monopoly on tourism held by firms owned by whites" he said. "Today," Abu Salem added, "since the problem of racism is no longer a factor, our main focus has shifted to promoting African tourism by encouraging, assisting and supporting African travel agents in their businesses and by encouraging indigenous peoples to play a more significant role in the tourism and travel industry overall."

Abu-Salem highlighted the fact that the AATTA is also offering chapter members a chance to visit and get acquainted with one another's tourism programmes. "Our meeting every year creates friendly relations among all those involved in the travel and tourism trade in general and can consequently create a means for productive negotiations and liaison among the African countries and with countries overseas."

هكذا من الأصل

Draw in Dakar

A 0-0 draw with Senegal was not the satisfying result Egypt was expecting, but it still leaves open the possibility of qualifying for the finals of the African Nations Cup in Burkina Faso in July 1998. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports

The outcome of the Egyptian national team's fourth meeting with Senegal, this time for a first leg qualifying match for the African Nations Cup, was about as exciting as watching laundry drip-dry on a late January day. The game, viewed by 50,000 spectators at Senegal's Leopold Sengor Stadium in Dakar, ended in a less than spectacular 0-0 draw despite ample scoring opportunities on both sides.

Setting aside the final result of the match, the encounter at least provided fans with an exciting day out. The two sides, out of African Group 3, struggled with all available means, allowed and forbidden, to nab first place in the most powerful of Africa's seven groups and thus on to the World Cup in France in 2000.

"It's a difficult mission but not impossible," said Farouk Gaafar, the Egyptian national team technical manager. "The result is satisfactory if we put into consideration all the obstacles the team has faced. Before the match, Medhat Abdel-Hadi and Hossam Hassan, the defender and striker, were both injured," he explained.

The Egyptian team, at times, looked closer to victory than Senegal thanks to the relentless footwork of Ali Maher, Ahmed El-Kass and Akram Abdel-Meguid. But, Ahmed El-Kass and teammate Tarek Moustafa in their zeal got carried away and were presented with red cards for rough play.

The game, which began with the football equivalent of a diplomatic tea party — all the niceties were observed — was on a war footing by the end of the second half. It was obvious from the beginning that both teams were as tense as ballerinas on opening night.

The fact that it was a Senegalese home game and their coach had called up seven of his professional players from France, Switzerland, Turkey and Morocco begged the question of, "How couldn't a team like Senegal beat the Egyptian team?" On the other hand, the Egyptian team was afraid to lose lest their reputation as the best African team would melt and whither like the Wicked Witch in the *Wizard of Oz*.

And so the dance went until the 39th minute of the second half when Ali Maher, a defender from Egypt and Ousmane Diop, the Senegalese goalkeeper, provided a bit of light relief by staging an impromptu boxing match on the pitch. The Ghanaian referee, Mamado Camara, promptly dismissed the sparring partners, forcing both teams to continue the match with ten players each.

The technical manager of the Senegal team, Amasta Fal, commenting on the match, said that he was pleased to draw with a team like Egypt and added that the Egyptian team played harmoniously due to their training. His loquacious praise, however, didn't prevent Fal from saying that he is pleased that the Senegalese team is now number one in Group 3.

Egypt has met Senegal three times prior to the Leopold Sengor Stadium encounter. The first time, the two faced off in the African Nations Cup in March 1986 where Egypt lost 0-1. They then played in 1987 in the All African Games in Nairobi where Egypt avenged themselves by besting Senegal 1-0. The third time ended, in a premonition of this year's game, when they drew in the final of the African Cup for Youth in Mauritius in '93.

Egypt will next play Ethiopia on 23 February, Morocco on 29 June, Senegal again on 13 July and Ethiopia on 27 July .



photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid

Ramadan nights

You may wonder what all that ruckus is just before *Iftar*. Is it people on their way home, a fight, elephants? What? **Eman Abdel-Moeti** discovers just what

It's hard to believe that some people have the energy to even look at a ball, never mind actually play with one during Ramadan's longest hour — that just before *Iftar*. But, many of Cairo's streets in the more popular districts come alive at that time when a game of street ball is afoot.

As not everyone cares to be a professional football player or to join one of the famous clubs, street ball has become the game of choice for many. It's fun, cheap, doesn't require a special kind of shoe or outfit, and the ball itself is handmade with foam and cloth wrapped and tied together. With a 60 minute match, entailing the same rules as football, but on a smaller sized court, street ball can be played anywhere at any time. It even has its own league which hosts people of all ages from nearby districts.

Still, however popular the game is throughout the year, it's the Ramadan tournaments that bring out the throngs. Because, as those in the know are aware, there is nothing better than a street ball match to kill the longest hour of the fasting day.

Hosting from 16 to 24 teams, the tournaments are held in *Sha'by*, or popular districts such as Abbassiya, Bulaq Abul-Ela, Bab El-Shaaria and many others. And since Ramadan is the month where friends gather, street ball is one of the best things to do together. Neighbours and friends meet and form seven-member teams to compete against acquaintances from the neighbourhood.

Some veteran players have been participating for as long as ten or fifteen years. Hassan El-Wahsh, made his debut in street ball when he was in high school. Today, the thirty-seven year-old father of three children sometimes joins his team of three time tournament winners to either play or act as referee. The game is, for all its bringing together of friends, taken seriously and emotions have been known to run high. Last year, when his team was eliminated from the tournament, El-Wahsh became so enraged he poured pitch on the court in order to curtail any other team's dreams of grandeur. As the not-so-even tempered Hassan is also known to have instigated several fights, his nickname of "El-Wahsh" (The Beast) is considered appropriate.

street ball, although it may be organised by amateurs, for some is quite a profitable business. The subscription paid by each of the different teams to participate in a championship is around LE50-60, a great part of which is reserved for the rent of an empty plot of land, usually a parking area, or some other barren lot in the neighbourhood. The remainder is used to cover necessities like score sheets, competition prizes, referees, and finally the organisers themselves.

The Ramadan tournaments host categories for all ages, and the competition takes place every night from the hour before *Iftar* until midnight. Sometimes, if the adrenalin is high, it may last into the wee hours just before dawn.

Syd, Millie and Ollie

THE ORGANISERS of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney have chosen the platypus, the echidna, and the kookaburra bird, in cartoon critter form, as the event's official mascots. Since the kangaroo and koala — the most obvious choices — are used world-wide in anything that has to do with the promotion of Australia, the organisers thought of using different species to showcase some of the country's other exotic wonders.

The platypus is to be named Syd for Sydney, the echidna, Millie for the new millennium and the kookaburra's name, Olly, is derived from "Olympics".

Games, games, games

INDONESIAN President Suharto has asked the minister of sport and youth affairs, Hayono Isman to assess the possibility of the country hosting the 2006 Asian Games and the 2008 Olympic Games.

Indonesia will host the 19th South East Asia Games next October at an estimated cost of 70 billion rupiah (US $29.3 million). The government has picked up the tab for modifying the county's major sports venues and the building of an athletes dormitory, but is relying heavily on private sector funding.

Skating passion

OSKANA Gritschuk and Yevgeny Platov of Russia topped off a spectacular performance entitled "Arabian passion" last Friday to take the ice dance title at the European Figure Skating Championships. In a departure from their fast-paced rock 'n' roll and Latin numbers of the past, their "Arabian passion" dance routine was set to ambient music by Peter Gabriel.

The three-times world title holders and reigning European champions finished clear of silver medal winning compatriots Angelika Krylova and Oleg Ovesinniakov. Third place went to the French couple Sophie Moniotte and Pascal Lavanchy who edged out teammates Marina Anissina and Gwendel Peizerat.

Comes a time

THERE is sad news for track fans as Olympic legend Carl Lewis has announced his intention to retire this year.

Lewis, one of the greatest athletics of all time, has made every United States Olympic team since 1980 and was voted *Track and Field* magazine "Athlete of the Decade" in the 1980s.

In addition to his nine Olympic titles, Lewis, 33, has won eight world championship gold medals, set seven world records and recorded 65 straight victories in the long jump between 1981 and 1991.

Lewis, after his final track event in Houston, Texas in June, plans to continue his involvement in charity work with handicapped children. The athlete has also hinted at making a new career in cinema after retiring.





Wonder down under

THE US'S PETE SAMPRAS has won his ninth Grand Slam singles title by winning the Australian Tennis Open in the men's event. The American served up a 6-2, 6-3, 6-3 defeat to the Spaniard Carlos Moya in the scorching heat of the Australian summer. Moya, a player known for his formidable fore-hand, appeared to wilt like a day lily under the gruelling conditions on the court. Sampras playing as if he had enough, even after two-five setters, to go the distance again and again, kept up relentless pressure on the European.

Sampras' victory, which took barely 89 minutes, over the 20-year-old Moya was the most one-sided Australian final in eight years. The number one world ranked American's achievement has only been bettered by one tennis celebrity, Bjorn Borg, holder of 11 Grand Slam titles, since the start of the era of open tennis in 1968.

A familiar name, often linked to the surname Navratilova, is once again being heard on the tennis circuit as 16 year-old Martina Hingis of Switzerland smashed her way into the record books. In a stunning upset in the women's finals Hingis became the youngest Grand Slam singles winner this century when she over-powered the 1995 champion, France's Mary Pierce, 6-2, 6-2 in a lop-sided final.

The only player younger than Hingis to win a major tournament was 15-year-old Charlotte "Lottie" Dodd, who won Wimbeldon back in 1887, when tennis was played in a way that, today, would seem like slow motion.

In her excitement, Hingis' mother, Melanie Molitor, who named her after family friend Navratilova, leapt 10 feet from the stands to embrace her daughter on the court.

The 1997 champion said she's young enough to hope to, someday, catch up to Navratilova's 18 major title wins. *(photos: AFP)*

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Above: portraits of family and friends. Left: Receiving the State Merit Award from President Sadat

Ahmed Abu Zikri:

Insight and incisions

Long, precise fingers, made for the scalpel — and the palette

He closed his private practice five years ago, when he was 81. It was not the end, only a recognition of the limitations brought on by time. He turned to art, which has saved him time and again over the years. From scalpel to paintbrush, his slender hands seem made for delicate undertakings.

He stopped going to his clinic in El-Sherifein Street when he felt that he could no longer be constantly on call. He had always been accessible to his patients, answering their phone calls himself, unafraid of the demands that so many doctors, today, consider eminently disagreeable — an affront to their importance as men of science. He never put up barriers to protect himself from the constant intrusions on his privacy. He is against the commercialisation, the elitism which has afflicted the medical practice. Today material affluence is often one of the main measures of a doctor's success. But Abu Zikri's career has given him a different kind of insight. After fifty years and more than a thousand operations, he knows the resilience that those in pain can find within themselves.

He studied under the pioneers: Ibrahim Fahmi Pasha El-Miniawi, Abdel-Wahab Pasha Moro, Abdallah El-Katib and Kamel Hussein. His greatest inspiration was Ali Pasha Ibrahim, whose brilliance in medicine and love of art may have inspired Abu Zikri's dual allegiance. His teachers were completely immersed in their passion for their profession; they passed this desire to live their work on to their students.

At a time when specialisations in surgery were still nascent, Abu Zikri undertook pioneering work in intestinal surgery, and the very first operations in neurosurgery in Egypt. His work in neurosurgery was taken up later by his student, Osman Sorour.

Born in 1911, in Fayoum, he was originally of Menoufi stock. His father was a civil engineer with the State Property Department (Maslahat Al-Amlak Al-Amiriyya); his maternal grandfather was an Azharite of Turkish origin.

He obtained his FRCS from Britain's Royal College of Surgeons in 1938. Ten years later, he visited the Mayo and Lahey clinics in the United States, and came back to Egypt, where he soon made a name for himself through his minute and painstaking operations on the esophagus, the endocrine and adrenal glands.

The modification he introduced to esophageal varices surgery was recorded on a film made by the Ministry of Health in 1965; later acquired by the Royal College of Australian Surgeons, it was shown at international conferences in Stockholm and Tokyo.

He was chair of Qasr El-Aini's Department of Surgery in 1966 and taught Magdi Yaqoub, Khairi El-Samra, Mohamed Rifaat and Atef Sallam. Sir Edward Hughes and Michael Debakey were colleagues and personal friends.

He was always a highly sociable man, with wide contacts. But things changed with the passing away of his wife a few months ago, and the slowing down of his personal pace. He goes on, nevertheless, not letting the abundance of time upset regimens kept for years. He wakes up early, between six and seven and listens to the BBC, preferring it to the television, which he finds unattractive, because it detracts from the time he has for reading. Reading is important, now especially, in order to avoid negative thoughts and the mental laxity which is so easily acquired. He flips through a two-volume reference on state-of-the-art surgery in Britain and the United States. He has just finished *Don Quixote*, discovering once more the world created by Cervantes.

His interest in literature started early. He could have studied literature, and, although he chose medicine instead, he never relinquished his literary inclinations. He narrates, rather than speaking, dwells on descriptions of time and space. Even medicine, for him, could never be divorced from literary expression.

He developed in a general atmosphere vastly different from that of today, he says. Public libraries and books in the sciences as well as arts, were an essential part of education; one developed proportionately to the quantity and quality of what one read. He goes to the Qasr El-Aini, though rarely. He is reserved in speaking of the decline in medical education, but deplores, nevertheless, the aversion to books instilled by the frenzied atmosphere.

If time has passed, his environment seems to have paused unchanged, as it was twenty or thirty years ago. A studied medley of paintings, impeccable carpets from Shiraz and Tabriz. This is not the fastidious of one accustomed to precision but the interest of a man who happens to love colour and texture.

On the faded ochre walls they are carefully arrayed — paintings by the Turkish artist Hedayat, who lived in Egypt all his life, Sabry Ragheb and the Wanli brothers, Albert Reiger and Carolus Duran. Over the years he collected them. He shows you through the rooms, a proud connoisseur.

In the main reception is the centre-piece, a portrait of his wife painted by Hussein Bikar in 1942. She wears a crimson dress and a green shawl. She gave her eyes, and her beauty, to their daughters.

In a display cabinet, the prizes he won in 1935, the Issa Pasha Hamdi and Phillips awards, nestle side by side with the State Merit Award, which he received some forty years later. They lie undisturbed on the Belgian glass, with only the jade birds from Paris for company.

He has always made it a point to choose his paintings with care, and to hang them in a manner meaningful to him. A miniature self-portrait by Seif Wanli in white shirt-sleeves faces Adham's ferociously vivid slave market — the traders' headgear belying the Turkish origin of the Wanli brothers themselves. His diffidence gives way to animation when he shows one, courteous, always, into the inner corridors, where the portraits he painted of his grandchildren hang, their brightness evocative of a Provençal landscape.

Bikar painted him three times, the first over thirty years ago. He likes the earliest portrait best, he says, because it is the least faithful.

He keeps photographs of his colleagues from university — athletic young men, starched and optimistic, in suits and ties. Some, like Ahmed Hussein and Nureddin Tarraf, were involved in politics. He had many opportunities, throughout his career, to take advantage of his contacts, to become close to those in influential positions, from Fouad Serageddin in the thirties, to Nasser and Sadat, but he never dabbled in politics. Apart from medicine, it was always art for him.

He still loves long trips and open spaces, spending the long summer vacations in his stone-built chalet in Agami, by the beach, acquired long before the north coast became the fashionable getaway for successful professionals.

He goes to the club occasionally, and visits his three sisters often. But his social life is greatly restricted now, because of the absence of his wife and because, like so many who have lived a long life, he has survived many of his friends.

He drives everywhere, never thinking of employing a chauffeur, regarding navigation through the hectic city streets as he would a surgical operation successfully completed — a task to be undertaken with aplomb and precision. He alternates between optimism at his ability to continue, and fear of decline. But he accepts the changes. Age has brought different satisfactions. He talks to his three grandchildren as he once did to their mothers: pleased to listen, never feeling the need to impose his opinion or offer unsolicited advice. When he falls back on the things he nurtured early — family, and his love for art — he is not alone for long.

Profile by ***Aziza Sami***